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by Edmond Hamilton



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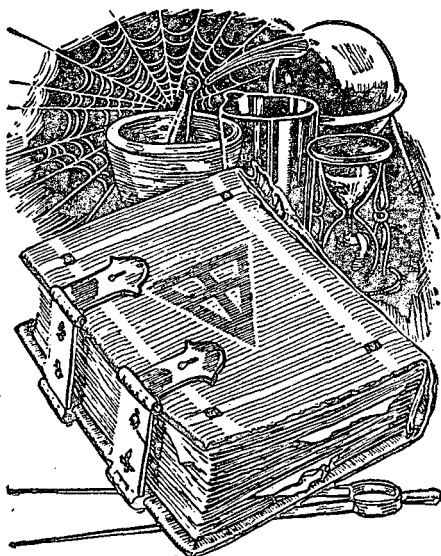
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AMAZING STORIES, Fact and Science Fiction, Vol. 36, No. 9, September, 1962, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, at 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago 5, Illinois. Subscription rates: One year United States and possessions \$3.50; Canada and Pan American Union Countries \$4.00, all other foreign countries \$4.50. Second Class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois and at additional mailing offices.

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SEPTEMBER, 1962

Vol. 36, No. 9

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SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All subscription correspondence should be addressed to AMAZING STORIES, Circulation Department, 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago 5, Illinois. Please allow at least six weeks for change of address. Include your old address, as well as new—enclosing if possible an address label from a recent issue.

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

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434 South Wabash Avenue
Chicago 5, Illinois
WAbash 2-4911

Western Office
9025 Wilshire Boulevard
Beverly Hills, California
CRestview 4-0265



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EDITORIAL

Not long from the time you are reading this we will be entering what the television people will be calling their "spectacular new season"—and we will all be promised a multiplicity of goodies on the old idiot box this Fall. Now, science fiction and fantasy has been slowly given an increased share of air time on television. No doubt the 1962-63 season will see this trend continue. And I am not optimistic about what the results will be.

The reason I am not optimistic is that I watched a lot of what passed for sf and fantasy last season. And apart from an occasional good job on *Twilight Zone*, it was awful. You want to know why I think so? O.K., here are some reasons:

1 — it is oversimplified to the point of cretinism. All Martians have three eyes. All heroes and villains are identifiable at 100 yards, in about one-tenth of a second. The plots end where a good, sf plot should begin.

2 — almost all the shows are built around a single gimmick—the exchange of bodies, the concept that in the world of the ugly a handsome girl is "deformed,"

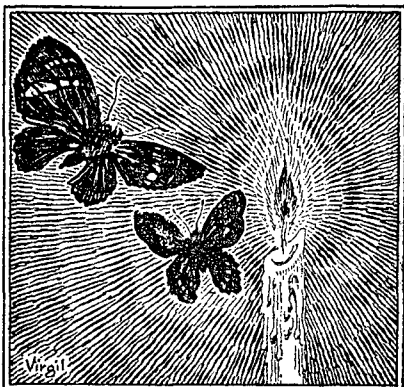
the most elementary idea of time travel.

3 — the attempts at humorous fantasy are so coy as to be downright nauseating.

4 — there is an over-reliance on dramatic (or trick) camera work, and on background music, to compensate for the lack of dramatic quality in the story line itself.

5 — the actors seem ashamed, as if they were saying—"We're just kidding, folks, we know this kind of stuff can't ever happen, but some nut wrote the script and, after all, it's a job."

If, as seems likely, there will be more sf and fantasy on television (I hear that some producer has bought the TV rights to all the Lovecraft-Derleth properties), people will, as they get more accustomed to the concepts, demand more adult offerings. (At least I hope so.) And just as, in this day of astronauts and Project Apollo, no science fiction magazine can hope to survive on space-opera alone, so eventually no television sf program will be able to survive if it continues to be simple-minded, or, worse yet, condescending.—N.L.

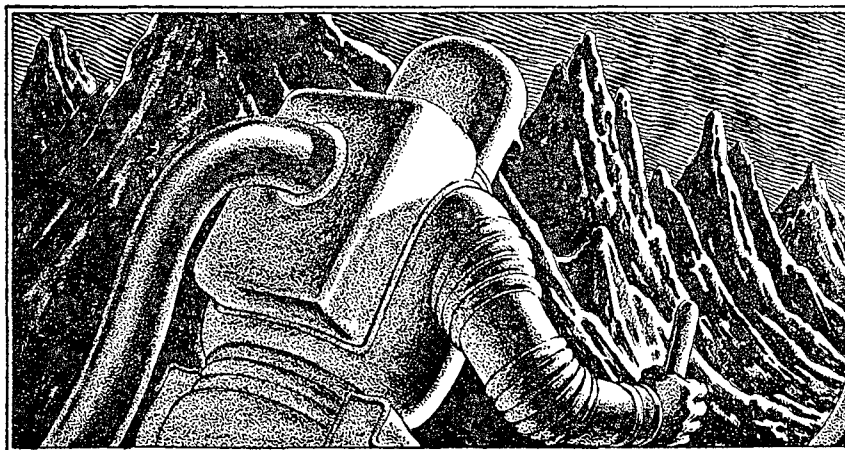


*He was walking in the pine
grove, with the resinous smell
of the trees in his nostrils. Once
he had met a smell vaguely
like it, far away from Earth.
Forget about that, a voice said
in his mind, but he would
never forget.*

SUNFIRE!

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Illustrated by FINLAY

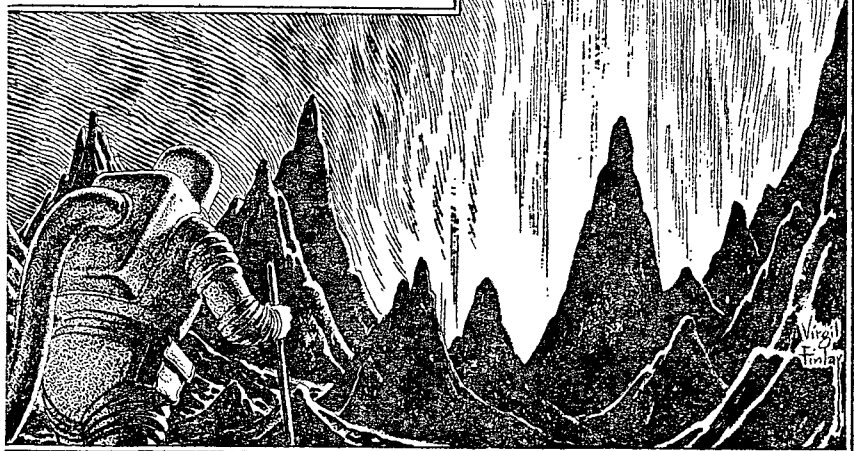


EVERYTHING in the old house seemed just the same as it had been before he went to space.

It was incredible, thought Hugh Kellard, standing in the front hall and looking around the silent, sunlit rooms, how little it had changed. The life was gone out of it now, all the people and voices and the comings and goings when his grandfather still lived and he had visited here. But that had been long ago, and he was amazed that so much remained still untouched.

"Like travelling into the past," thought Kellard, "to come back to this part of Earth."

He was tired, in body and mind and nerve, and he stood for a while, just staring. The agent who cared for the old



place had let him in and gone away, and there was not a sound in the house. He walked into the living-room where his grandfather's desk still stood beneath a window, and looked out. The window faced northward, along the California coastal cliffs that run north along Morro Bay to Big Sur. The Pacific foamed and surged against the huge broken stones beneath the cliffs, and the hills, somber now with a tinge of autumn, shouldered massively up toward the east from the cliff road. It all looked as lonely as ever, no other houses in sight but this gray, weatherbeaten house that had faced the sea-wind and the sea-fog for over a hundred years.

Kellard walked back along the hall. On its walls still hung the ornately framed family photographs which his grandfather had stubbornly kept in place. His great-grandfather, and his great-aunt something, and all the rest of them, on back into the shadows. They were all there, they had not been touched, nothing in the house had been touched, just as his grandfather's will had enjoined. Keep the old house, he had said. Some of the family will be back some day.

The old man had been right, he thought. One of the family had come back at last, one who had roamed farther than almost anybody on Earth.

"But that's all done with," he told himself. "Here I am, and here I stay. I'm through with space."

HE started through the rooms, opening windows, letting in light and air. The furniture was faded and old-fashioned, but the place was not dusty, the agent had seen that it was kept in shape. Kellard picked one of the big upstairs bedrooms for himself, and brought in the blankets and cartons and luggage from the car. He went into the utility room and turned on the power-unit, remembering as he did so how his grandfather had disliked and distrusted the unit, how he had refused to have one until the electric wires were all gone and there was no other way to get power. He checked the stove and freezer, shoved his cartons of food into the latter, and then looked around and wondered what to do next.

Standing in the silent house, he wondered suddenly if he had been foolish to quit everything and come back to Earth and this old place?

No, he thought heavily. Mercury ended it for me. I made my decision and that is that. Forget it.

He strode abruptly out of the house and started walking. And after a little while the dark weight in his mind, the somber knowledge, faded and receded in

the new-found, old-remembered interest of the things about him.

His way took him across the road, past the shabby barns and up sloping pastures where once his grandfather had kept the fine horses he bred. Then he was in among the pines, climbing more steeply, with the resinous smell of the trees strong in his nostrils. That smell he had never forgotten, and once he had met a smell vaguely like it, far away from Earth—

Forget all that, Kellard.

The trees took him in and he walked through a dapple of sun and shadows. A deer slipped away through the pines ahead of him, and quail burst up from almost under his feet. He remembered a grove of bigger pines farther up the slope, and an old man and a boy walking up to them. How long ago was that? He had been fifteen—and he was thirty-two now. Seventeen years. Still, he thought he could find the place.

He found it. The big pines were still there, for people did not use wood much any more. The rough dark giants stood at dignified intervals from each other, and he sat down with his back against the massive trunk of the biggest.

Funny, he thought. When I was a boy sitting here dreaming about the future and what I was going to do, I never once imagined that some things would

stay much the same. The whole world would somehow be miraculously transformed—but it wasn't. This tree was here when men first reached the Moon, and Mars, and Venus and the rest, but it didn't know about that, it didn't change because of it.

KELLARD sat for a long time, still wrapped in a gray weariness, his emotions in a numb trance. He sat listening to the distant, uneasy murmur of the sea, until the sunset light shafting through the trees dazzled his eyes, and then he got up and went back down to the house. He heated food, ate it, and then went out to the porch in front of the house and sat watching the sun sink toward the vast golden sheet of the Pacific. He thought of the little dot close to the sun that he could not see, the little world and the strange, terrible place upon it where Morse and Binetti had died.

The telephone rang.

Kellard did not stir, and it rang and rang again.

Go ahead and ring your head off, he thought. You're not getting me back. I told you. I've had it.

The ringing stopped. The sun sank and darkness came with the hosts of wheeling stars, and there was no sound but the vast voices rolling in from sea, as Kellard sat staring and drinking.

He finally got up, as the fog started coming in. He moved with gravity, feeling much better. He went in and turned on the lights, and then looked at the faces that stared from the long row of framed photographs.

He raised the bottle to them in a gesture of salutation.

"You see, Kellards, that your prodigal son—or great-grandson—has come home again from space."

He gravely drank, and continued to stand looking along the faded faces.

"You were lucky—you know that? Back in your time, there were hopes, and dreams, and man's road would go on forever, from triumph to triumph everlasting. But that road was a blind alley, all the time, even if I'm the only one who knows it."

The faces looked back at him, unchanging, but he read reproach in their steady gaze, their lined features.

"I'm sorry," said Kellard. "You had your own troubles, I know. I apologize, Kellards. I am very tired and a little drunk, and I am going to bed."

THE next morning he was making coffee when there came a banging of the old-fashioned knocker on the front door. A certain tightness came into Kellard's face. He had expected them to send some one.

He had not expected the man who stood at the door. He was not in Survey uniform, although he was the highest brass there was. He was a big, slow-moving man with a heavy face and blue eyes that seemed mild if you didn't know him.

"Well," said Kellard. And after a moment, "Come on in."

Halfrich came in. He sat down and looked interestedly around at the old room and furniture.

"Nice," he murmured. Then he looked at Kellard and said, "All right, let's have it. Why did you quit?"

Kellard shrugged. "It was all in my letter of resignation. I'm getting a bit old and tired for Survey, I—"

"Bull," said Halfrich. "It was something about that crack-up on Sunside, wasn't it?"

Kellard said slowly, "Yes. The deaths of Binetti and Morse, and the after-effects of that shock, made me feel I didn't have it any more."

Halfrich looked at him. "You've had crack-ups before. You've seen men die. You've had almost as many years in Survey as I have, and you've taken as many jolts. You're lying, Kellard."

Kellard got up, and walked a few steps and swung around again.

"So I'm lying. I want out, and what difference does it make why?"

"It makes a difference," Halfrich said grimly. "I remember from away back at Academy, even though you were two years after me. You were the space-craziest cadet there was. You spouted the glories of the conquest of space until we were all sick of it. You haven't changed in all the years in Survey—until now. I want to know what can change a man like that."

Kellard said nothing. He went to the window and looked out at the long rollers coming endlessly in and crashing against the rocks.

"What did you see on Sundside, Kellard?"

He turned around sharply at that.

"What do you mean? What would there be to see there, but hot rocks and volcanoes and a cross-section of hell generally? It's all in my report."

Halfrich sat like a judge, and spoke like one pronouncing sentence. "You saw something, you *met* something there. You covered by tearing out the film of the automatic sweep-camera. Whatever it had recorded, you didn't want us to see, did you?"

Kellard came toward him and spoke angrily and rapidly. "Do you realize that we flamed out and crashed there? A crash like that can do damage. It killed Binetti and mortally injured Morse, and smashed the sweep-camera."

Halfrich nodded. "That's what

we thought, at first. But the radar-sweep had an automatic recorder too. It was something new. Binetti knew about it, as communications officer, but I guess he hadn't told you, or you'd have smashed it too. Its record shows something."

A COLD feeling came over Kellard. He had thought that he had covered everything, but he had calculated from insufficient data.

He kept his nerve. A radar record was not like a photograph, they couldn't prove much from that, they certainly couldn't guess the truth from it. They *must* not guess the truth.

He laughed mirthlessly. "A radar record made on Sundside isn't worth the paper it's on. The storms of radiation there make radar practically unreliable."

Halfrich was watching him keenly. "But not entirely. And over and above the static and the fake bogies, the record shows quite clearly that you went outside the ship after the crash, that you walked about a thousand yards, and that you were approached by some things that register vaguely but unmistakably."

He paused and then he asked, "Who—or what—did you meet there, Kellard?"

Kellard was cold inside, but all the same he made a disgusted

sound that he hoped was convincing.

"Who would I meet on Sun-side? Beautiful lightly-clad maid-ens? After all, you know, it's only four hundred degrees Cen-tigrade there, and practically no atmosphere, and nothing much else but solar radiation and hot rock and volcanoes. I tell you, the radar record is worthless."

Halfrich was studying him with that mild estimating look that Kellard knew well, and didn't like at all. It was the look that came into Halfrich's face when friendship didn't matter and the good of the Survey did.

"You're still lying," he said. "You met or saw something there. And it did something to you—something that made you resign. Something that's taken all the life and eagerness out of you."

"Oh, hell, be reasonable!" said Kellard angrily. "You know no kind of life can exist on Sun-side. My mission was the second time even Survey has landed there. Pavlik's mission, the first, didn't see anything. Neither did I. Quit dreaming it up. Go back to Mojave and your job, and leave me be."

HALFRICH rose. "All right," he said. "I'll go back to the base. And you're going with me."

"Oh, no," said Kellard. "I'm through, quit, resigned."

"Your resignation has not been accepted," Halfrich told him. "You're still liable to Survey discipline. You'll obey orders just as you always did, or you'll go up before a court-martial."

"So that's it," said Kellard.

Halfrich nodded. "That is it. I don't like to do this. You're an old friend. But—"

"But the Survey comes first," Kellard said, between his teeth.

"The Survey," said Halfrich, "comes first. It has to. It's why we've got stations on Venus and Mars and Ganymede, not to say the Moon. It's why we'll someday be able to hit for deep space and the starworlds. And when one of my best officers suddenly goes off the deep end and won't say why, I'll damn well wring it out of him. Whatever you found on Mer-cury doesn't belong to you, it be-longs to us, and we'll have it."

Kellard looked at him and started to say something and didn't, and then turned his back on Halfrich and looked out the window at the sea. In a low voice he said,

"Let it be, John. I'm telling you now, you'll be sorry if you don't."

There was no answer to that at all, and the silence was his answer. He turned back around.

"All right, you have a rope around my neck. I'll go back to base with you. I'll tell you not one thing more than here."

"In which case," Halfrich said,

"we'll go on out to Sunside, and you'll go right along with us."

A rage born of desperation came to Kellard. He had tried to spare people this—Halfrich, the Survey, the whole human race. But they would not let it be so. Damn them, he thought, if they must do this, they have it coming to them.

"All right," he said flatly. "I'll get my jacket. I take it that you have a flier waiting."

THE fast flier, less than an hour later, whizzed down over the gaunt mountains and across the desert, and the glitter and splendor of Mojave Base sprang up to meet them. The tall ships shone like silver, and something about them, something about the feel of the place, made you think that this bit of desert did not belong to Earth at all but was part of space, a way-station, the first way-station of all, to the stars.

That, thought Kellard, was what he had thought when he had first come here, years ago. And it had not been just a youngster's passing enthusiasm, it had deepened and strengthened through all the years of work and danger—until Sunside. And oh God, he thought, why did I have to go there, at that place, at that moment. I could have lived my whole life and done my work, all of us could have, without ever dreaming the truth.

He knew now that he had no choice. He must go back to Sunside with them. For even if he told them the truth, they would not believe, they would insist on going to see for themselves. He would keep silent, and that was all he could do now.

* * *

Four days later a Y-90 experimental cruiser, outfitted for space research and with full anti-heater equipment, took off from Mojave. Kellard had kept silent. And still silent he sat in his recoil-harness and took the jolts, and heard Halfrich grunting beside him, and viciously hoped that that he was not liking it.

Halfrich had brought along a consulting biophysicist, a keen-faced man of middle age named Morgensen, who did not look as though he was enjoying the mission either. But the three-man crew of the little Y-90 were young men in their twenties. They spoke to Halfrich and to Kellard as though they were heroes out of legend, for in the Survey twelve to fifteen years of space-missions was an age.

It was only after they had gone a long way and a long time through the sunwashed spaces that one of the three, Shay, the navigator, ventured to put a question to Kellard.

"You were with the first mission to Ganymede, sir, weren't you?"

Kellard nodded. "Yes, I was."
"Wouldn't that have been something!" said Shay. "I mean, to be the first."

"It was something," said Kellard.

"Maybe someday I——" Shay began, and broke off and then went on, "I mean, if the star-drive is perfected as soon as some people say it will be, I could maybe be one of the first ones out there? Sir?"

"You could be," said Kellard. "Someone's going to be first. The stars are waiting. All we have to do is go out there and keep going, and the stars will be ours, just like the planets here are, all ours, forever and amen."

Shay looked at him puzzledly, and shuffled, and then went away. Halfrich had been listening, and watching. He said, "Did you have to slap the kid's face?"

Kellard shrugged. "What did I say? I was merely repeating what everyone feels, these days. The glory of the conquest of space."

"I'd give a lot," Halfrich said, "to know what's riding you. We'll soon reach Sunside and we'll find out, but I wish you'd tell me now."

"All right," said Kellard. "I'll tell you. I've been disinherited. That's what's wrong with me."

HE would say nothing more, nor did Halfrich ask him another question, until the Y-90 was

far in past the orbit of Venus and going into its pattern of approach.

"I assume," said Halfrich, "that you bear none of us any personal ill-will. If there is anything dangerous awaiting us, now would be the time to tell us."

Kellard considered. "You're going to land, I suppose, at the same spot where we crashed."

"Of course."

"Then land, said Kellard. "As far as I know, there is not a thing there to harm you."

In the scanner, he watched Mercury swing slowly toward them, a tiny crescent of white that was hard to see against the Sun. For here the Sun was a monster thing, fringed with writhing flames, paling the stars, drenching this whole area with radiation that already would have killed them but for the ship's anti-heaters.

Kellard remembered that when he had come this way before, Binetti had quoted something, a line from William Blake's poems, he had said. "*The desire of the moth for the star.*" And that was what we were, he thought. Three little moths, going right into the furnace, and I was the only one to get out of it, but now I'm going back.

The Y-90 went into its landing pattern. It skimmed over the dark side of Mercury, the black cliffs and peaks and chasms that never

saw the Sun, and then light seemed to burst ragingly up from all the horizon ahead of them, and they were over Sunside.

In old days this little world had been called "the moon of the Sun," and it looked like it, the same stark, lifeless rock plains and ridges and cracks, the fang-like look of pinnacles in a place where no atmosphere eroded anything. But the Moon was cold and still, whereas Sunside seemed to throb with sullen hidden fires. Volcanoes spewed ash and lava, and the infernal storm of radiation from overhead made everything quiver in a shimmering haze. The indicator board told them that the temperature of the outside hull was climbing to four hundred as the Y-90 went down.

And the wide valley that haunted his dreams opened up ahead.

Across it the squat volcanic cones still dribbled ash and dust and it was all just as it had been when he had last looked back from the relief cruiser that had come from Venus Station to take him off. And there gleamed bright on its floor the crumpled wreck in which Binetti and then Morse had died.

Kellard's gaze flew to the place north of the wreck, the tumbled, odd-shaped rocks. He felt his palms sweating. Maybe there would be nothing. After all, could it all happen again?

They set down, and after the crashing rocket uproar, the steady throb of the anti-heaters was an anti-climactic sound.

"You've got the armor ready?" Halfrich asked of Morgenson.

The biophysicist nodded nervously. "Three suits, with their anti-heater equipment tested on and off all the way out."

"One suit stays here, for emergencies," Halfrich said. "Kellard and I will go out, when there's something to go out for. First, we'll make observations."

THE recording telescope-cameras and the radar, Halfrich ordered focused on the place of the odd-shaped rocks. And then, sitting there on Sunside, they watched. They waited.

Nothing.

Kellard's hopes began to rise. He was right, he told himself, it couldn't happen again.

"How long," he asked, "are we going to sit waiting for nothing because a radar made a screwy record? If those anti-heaters quit for five minutes, we're fried."

Halfrich looked at him bleakly. "I'll tell you how long. Till you tell the truth, and we see the truth for ourselves. That's how long."

Kellard shrugged. "If that's the way you want it. I would tell you to go to hell except that we're already there."

They watched and waited some more.

Morgenson said, on a rising note of excitement, "There's something——"

Halfrich got to the 'scope fast. Kellard, looking through the scanner, saw the geyser of flame that was beginning to pour up from the rocks. It grew slowly, but steadily, in height.

"What is it?" Halfrich asked him.

Can't you see for yourself?" said Kellard. "There's a blowhole out there and it throws off burning gases from the interior. It did it twice while I was waiting in the wreck."

Halfrich said, "It's in the same location where radar recorded you before, with those other blips. There's something about this—We'll go have a look."

"If you must," said Kellard. "You'll find it's just what I've said."

They got into the heat-armor. It was a clumsy outfit, for it had to have room for an efficient anti-heater, and the long tube of the heat-discharge was a nuisance. Kellard had spent days in one of these suits, waiting for the relief ship after the crackup, and he did not like the feel of it at all.

Halfrich tested the radio and then said, "All right, Shay, lock us out and stand by. Morgenson, you keep watching."

They stepped upon Sunside.

There beat down upon them such a storm of radiation, such cataracts of heat and light, that instinctively they bowed their heads as before a deluge. It took an effort of will to step forward through that tempest, but Halfrich made it. They walked, slowly and heavily, and at first they saw only the blackened rocks beneath their feet, and the little puddles and rivulets of molten lead, and their own massive armored feet plodding.

Then, as they went forward, they straightened against the impact. Through the face-plate of his armor, dimmed by the many-layered filters, Kellard saw the column of flame ahead. It was a hundred feet high now, and growing higher, and though there was no air-borne sound on this almost airless world, the sound of it came through the rocks and the soles of their feet, a throbbing and roaring that quivered through all their bodies.

THEY reached the tumbled rocks, and stopped. And now the fire-fountain was so lofty that they had to lean back their heads to look at its topmost crest. Some unthinkable diastole and systole of the fiery planet was at work, and this periodic geyser of flame was its result. The rocks shook and roared, and the fires raged higher, and Kellard thought again, what devil is in

the blood of our race that drives us to places like this where we should not be?

"I told you," he said to Half-rich. "Just a blowhole, that's all."

"The blips on the record moved," said Halfrich. "There was more than this."

"Look around you!" cried Kellard desperately. "Do you see anything moving, anything that *could* move? You were wrong, Halfrich. Do you have to keep us here until we all die, because you can't admit you're wrong?"

Halfrich hesitated. "I wasn't wrong. You're still lying. But we'll go back to the ship and wait."

They turned their backs on the fire-fountain, and Kellard felt the sweat pouring on his forehead. It hadn't happened this time, and they couldn't wait forever, they would have to go away and—

Morgenson's voice chattered in their ears. "Blips showing, coming—" And then he suddenly yelled, "I see them! They—"

Halfrich swung around with ponderous swiftness. There was nothing between them and the fire-fountain, nothing around the spouting flames.

"Above you, coming down!" shouted Morgenson. "My God, what—?"

Kellard slowly raised his head. Because he knew what to look for, he saw them while Halfrich was

still gazing around searching.

They came flashing down out of the sky. There were four of them this time—no, five. They were like five individual swirls of shining light, so bright that the sun-bleached heavens seemed to darken around them.

Halfrich said bewilderedly, "I don't see—"

Kellard pointed upward. "There."

"Those flakes of flame?"

"Not flakes of flame," said Kellard. "They are the children of the stars."

Halfrich went rigid, staring upward. And now Kellard knew that there was no more hope. No hope at all.

THE five bright things had flashed down toward the great fire-fountain. They plunged into it, out of it, climbed swift as the eye could follow, racing up its mighty geyser, frolicking in it joyously. The fountain raved higher and the five sped up and whirled and danced upon its rising plume, and Kellard thought that they were laughing.

In and out of the leaping fires they plunged, and then one of them veered down toward the place where Halfrich and Kellard stood. There was something so humanly purposeful in its sudden movement that Halfrich stepped back.

"Stand still," said Kellard.

"But—" Halfrich protested.

"They won't hurt us," said Kellard, his voice flat and dull. "They're friendly, playful, curious. Stand still."

And now all five of the flashing flames were around them, darting, recoiling, then gliding forward again to touch their heat-armor with questing tendrils of living force, living light.

Halfrich spoke, trying to keep his voice steady but forming the words in a choked fashion.

"Something—in my mind—"

"They're telepathic, in a way you can't even imagine," said Kellard. "And they're curious. They're curious about us, what we are, how we think. They can merge minds with us, somehow." And he added, with a last cruel impulse of dying anger, "You wanted to know. Now know."

He had time to say nothing more before the impact hit him, just as it had that other time, the full stunning shock of unearthly minds interlocking with his own, searching out his thoughts and memories.

Curious, yes. Like children who have found strange, ungainly creatures and wish to know how they live. And as they entered his mind, Kellard's mind entered theirs, fused with them, and there was again the dizzying whirl of memories and feelings that were not his own, that his different, more brutishly physical nature

could never apprehend more than dimly.

But that half-apprehension was staggering. He was no longer Hugh Kellard, a man with flesh and bones who had been born on an air-drowned heavy planet named Earth.

He was one of the children of the stars.

His memory stretched far back, for his life was almost unlimited in time. For long and long beyond human comprehension he had lived with his companions the strange and beautiful life of their kind.

Born of the stars, of the unimaginable forces, pressures, temperatures, atomic conditions within the mighty suns. Born, as the end product of an evolutionary chain almost as old as the universe itself, a grouping of photons that grew toward consciousness, toward individuality and volition. Their bodies were force, rather than matter, their senses had nothing to do with sight or hearing, their movement was an effortless flash and glide as fast as the photons of light itself.

WITH the other kind of life in the universe, the heavy slow-moving things of matter that grew upon the comparatively cold, dark planets, they had had nothing to do at all. They were of the suns, not the planets,

and those chill worlds of fixed, solid matter so repelled them that they would not even approach most of them.

Star-child, star-child, at home in the bursting splendors of the stellar fires, and able to move like light from star to star. And again Kellard felt the agony of that ecstasy that was his in this shared memory.

"We things of matter, we men, who thought that space and the stars would be ours—"

But how could the wide universe belong to solid, heavy, physical creatures who must painfully move in bubbles of air, who crawled between the petty planets encased in metal tombs, who could not even approach the glories of the great suns?

No, the ecstasy was one that men would never know except at secondhand through this brief contact! The glorious rush together of the star-children through the vast abysses, drinking up the energy of the radiation about them. The audacious and dangerous coasting along the shores of dark nebulae, racing the lumbering comets and leaving them behind, on until you felt through all your photons the beckoning warmth of the star you approached. Ignore the cinders called planets that creep around it, speed faster, faster, brothers, the way has been long but we are almost there! And

now the radiation that was so weak in the outer darks is strong and lusty-roaring, and the great prominences reach out like arms to gather us in. The shock, the joy, of the first plunge once more into the star. Dive deep, brothers, deep through the outer fires into the throbbing solar furnaces where the atoms are hammered as in forges, changing, shifting their shapes, exploding into force.

Spin in the vortices of the great stellar tornadoes, fling off and fall headlong and then dive laughing in again. Search for the others of your kind, if there are none here there will be at the next star. Up again, out of the boiling fires, and then drift quiet, dreaming; in the pearly glow of the corona, endless afternoon of warmth and light and peace.

BUT on the sunward side of the tiny planet nearby, a plaything beckons. Fire and light fountain up from the solid rock. There at least we can go, for that place is washed by tides of solar life, not chilled and dead. Speed down toward it, as the fire, the life it spouts higher out of the repellantly fixed and solid matter. Frolic in the fountain, through and around it as it rises higher. And what are the things that move on the rock near it, the things that look grotesquely as though matter had been endowed

SUNFIRE!

19

with life? Reach out with your thought-senses and try to apprehend them. Mind, life—in matter! Try to understand how matter thinks, how matter feels, plumb the grotesque memories of them, the vistas of crawling things at the bottom of whelming air-oceans, things of clay too frail to endure, yet things that in their brief living have come here. But the mind recoils from such memories, such a life.

Brothers, we go! First to refresh ourselves in the deepest streams of the star, and then away across the abysses to another star we know. There is nothing to hold us here—

And the oneness was gone from Kellard's mind, and he was no child of light and stars, he was a man of clay, standing stupid and sick and shaking by the falling fires of the fountain.

He looked at Halfrich. But Halfrich stood, with his head bowed, and Kellard felt only pity.

He touched his arm. "We'll go back to the ship."

For a long moment, Halfrich did not respond. Then he turned and walked, plodding with head down, not looking up once at the flaring sky.

* * *

In the little ship, he sat later with Kellard. He had not spoken yet, and Morgenson and the others, bewildered and awed, had

still not dared ask questions. Finally Halfrich looked at Kellard, pain still in his eyes.

"I was thinking," he said. "I was remembering my little boy, years ago. He had just learned to walk, and he started out the door, eager to explore the whole town. He stubbed his toe, and he sat down and cried."

"You tried to spare me this," said Halfrich after a little while. "Thanks for that, Kellard. It didn't work, but thanks anyway."

Kellard said, "Look, no one else knows. No one else is ever likely to know. The only place where the men of matter and the children of stars could meet is a place like Sunside, and how many such meetings would ever by chance happen? We don't have to tell everyone, to take the heart and eagerness out of them by letting them know they'll always be second-best in space."

Halfrich thought about that. And then he shook his head. "No. We've stubbed our toe. We've learned we're not and never will be the sole inheritors of the universe. All right, we'll accept the fact and go on. The planets will be ours, just the same. And someday—" He paused, then said, "—someday, maybe, the sons of the planets and the children of stars will take hands, know each other. No, Kellard. We'll tell them."

THE END

**The caves of the Dead Sea are not the only places
where ancient Biblical scrolls are being unearthed.**

For example, here is an . . .

Apocryphal Fragment

By
**EDWARD
WELLEN**

AND Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, the same that on a time had said, Except I shall see on his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

This same Thomas was journeying south through the Negev to Elath, whence he would take passage to India. And in the heat of the day he spied an oasis but, except he should drink of the water on its pool and rest in the shade of its doom palms, he would not believe it was other than mirage.

So he turned not aside, but stumbled on. And his toe struck a thing in the sand. After calling the name of the Lord, Thomas knelt to unearth the thing and, lo, it was a bottle, and, behold, the bottle bore upon its stopper the seal of Solomon, that wisest—womanwise—of men.

And Thomas took up the bottle and eyed it and saw through glass darkly only a smoke that swirled as he turned the bottle in the sun.



Illustrated by SUMMERS

He smiled, disbelieving in jinn.

Now, Thomas made to let fall the bottle but, bethinking him that an empty bottle would serve to hold water wherewith to quench his thirst on his journey, he broke the seal and loosed the stopper.

Whereupon a jinni jetted out through the mouth of the bottle and uprose in a cloud very like a mushroom, while the force of its release impelled the bottle to shoot from off the pad of Thomas's hand.

And the bottle dashed to bits against a rock. Wherefore Thomas called again upon the Lord.

THEN he heard the voice of the jinni, which said, and its voice seemed the sands singing, Be not afeared, for by the Lord you have sworn by, and by my master, Solomon, the flight of the bottle is not against nature (it shall be given to one Isaac to

come upon the laws of motion, the third of which is applicable here), nor am I, if you but knew the laws.

And again Thomas called the name of the Lord and said, This is nothing other than the voice of madness, for I am suffering a stroke of the sun.

And the jinni answered, saying, Nay, I am what my master, Solomon, made me, a gaseous-state computer having power to answer three questions. I can set to rest your doubts about anything under the sun or among the stars. Ask, and you shall receive. Thrice ask, and thrice will I answer you.

And Thomas the doubter said, Will you truly answer me? And the jinni said, Yes!

And Thomas smiled and said, Truly? And the jinni said, Yes!

And Thomas grew grave and said, But truly? And the jinni said, Yes! and vanished.

THE END

Through Time and Space With Benedict Breadfruit: VII

THE Black Beast of Betelgeuse, although horrible in aspect, was really a very pleasant fellow when you got to know him, as Benedict Breadfruit did. But because of his alienness he was forbidden to go to Earth by a Galactic Space Lines regulation forbidding tickets to be sold to "horrible monsters".

"It's an unfair law," said the Black Beast. "You're a man of some importance, Benedict; couldn't you do something about it?"

Breadfruit nodded. "I believe I can get the reg annulled, *Bete Noir*."

—GRANDALL BARRETTON

EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL LIFE Part 3

By BEN BOVA

Is life an inevitable feature of the universe?

If we pick out a star at random and assume that it has a planetary system, is it reasonable to conclude that one or more of those planets must bear life?

"Inevitable" is a hard word for scientists to swallow. They are trained to consider nothing as inevitable. Science deals with probabilities; an experiment or theory may approach absolute certainty, but will never reach it. So by "inevitable," on the pages to follow, we mean ninety-nine plus percent certain.

the Inevitability of Life

THE LIVING SOLAR SYSTEM



Illustrated by FINLAY

WE know that life has evolved on Earth. In our July article we saw that the chances for life on Mars are excellent; that Venus is another strong possibility as a harbor for life, and that giant Jupiter might also bear living creatures beneath its swirling clouds. The other giant planets seem less likely to have life, and Mercury, Luna and Pluto are apparently barren, we deduced.

Notice what these speculations force us to conclude: *life is an in-*

tegral part of the Solar System. In other words, the same forces that fashioned the Sun and planets have also brought about the creation of living things. Until quite recently, there was no evidence whatsoever to either support or destroy this conclusion. But in the past few years a steady flow of authenticated experimental evidence has been accumulating. Together with two powerful theoretical concepts, they have made it seem virtually certain that life is as much a part of the Solar System—and the universe—as are the Sun and stars. It now seems clear that the processes that formed the planets simultaneously prepared the groundwork for the evolution of living creatures.

EVOLUTION OF THE MOLECULES

BEFORE we discuss the experimental evidence for life beyond the Earth, we should examine two comparatively recent concepts from the field of biochemistry: (1) chemical evolution; and (2) autocatalysis.

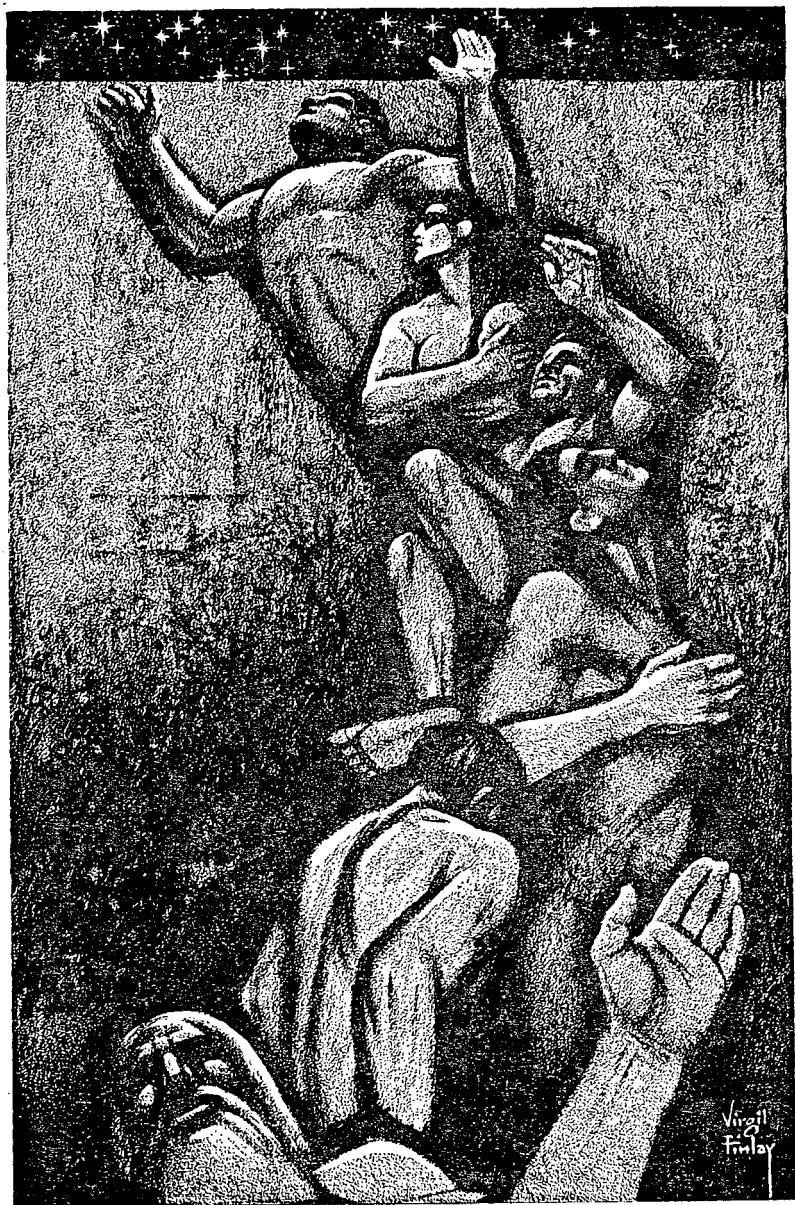
Chemical evolution: This concept bridges the gap between atoms and life. If we conceive of the simplest form of life as a single nucleoprotein molecule—a combination of a DNA molecule and a protein molecule—we can see that even this primitive “creature” is enormously complicated in comparison to non-

living molecules. DNA itself contains millions of atoms in an intricate structure; how can we explain its creation out of individual atoms of carbon, oxygen, etc.?

The concept of chemical evolution simply implies that there was a period when the simple elements and compounds combined in constantly more complicated ways to form constantly larger, more complex molecules. Eventually—in the course of billions of years—DNA evolved, together with other molecules essential to life such as RNA and the various proteins.

Autocatalysis: Chemical evolution tells us what happened; autocatalysis helps to explain how it happened. Briefly, the theory is that certain chemical substances tend to catalyze (speed up) reactions that lead to the formation of more of themselves. Thus, chemical substance A might be able to react in a number of ways to produce either substance B, C, D, or E. Let us say that E is the best autocatalyst: its very presence near A will “induce” A to manufacture more of E.

Now, E, in turn, may be able to form substances F; G or H. If H is a better autocatalyst than its two competitors, E will turn out mostly H. This mechanism has been verified in chemical laboratories. It helps to



show how simple chemical compounds "want to" form more complex ones, while at the same time showing that they will not form any compound at random, but will tend to build up only those compounds that are the best autocatalysts. In a chemical sense, this is "survival of the fittest," a natural technique of chemical evolution.

We can see, then, that chemical evolution was not at the mercy of random chance; it followed the rules of natural selection in much the same way that biological evolution obeyed definite laws and followed limited pathways.

EVIDENCE OF LIFE

NOW, with a grasp on our two theoretical concepts, we can examine the experimental evidence for life beyond the Earth.

Item: In 1959, Dr. Melvin Calvin of the University of California announced that he had found in a meteorite minute traces of an organic material that might well be "the precursor of genetic material." Dr. Calvin identified this chemical as being very similar to cytosine, one of the vital building-blocks of DNA. The chemical was found in a meteorite that had fallen in Kentucky in 1950 and had been promptly transferred to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. To make certain that the cytosine-like

chemical was actually part of the meteorite and not an Earthly contaminant, Dr. Calvin performed similar chemical analyses on other meteorite samples from the Smithsonian. No trace of organic material was found.

Dr. Calvin feels that we have thus obtained a sample of an intermediate step in the long chain of chemical evolution. Within the meteorite, chemical reactions had produced a substance that is but one or two steps away from DNA—the fundamental chemical of life, the "blueprint" chemical that reproduces itself and also builds RNA and the proteins.

Item: In 1952, at the University of Chicago, biochemist Sidney Miller mixed the elements of the Earth's primeval atmosphere (water vapor, ammonia, methane, etc.) and passed an electrical discharge through them. Two simple types of amino acids were obtained. Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins; proteins, in turn, are vital to living creatures. Miller's experiment showed that amino acids (and, presumably, proteins) could arise through autocatalysis in Earth's primeval atmosphere.

Item: Several researchers have succeeded in synthesizing protein from amino acids.

Item: In France in 1960, biochemist J. Oro mixed lethal hy-

drogen cyanide with an aqueous solution of ammonia. After a few hours at room temperature, the mixture formed a small amount of adenine, another of the structural units of DNA. Autocatalysis again.

Item: In 1961, at Convair Scientific Research Laboratory, Dr. Rainer Berger subjected a mixture of methane, ammonia and water—at minus 300° F—to a beam of protons. Several organic chemicals were formed. Dr. Berger believes that his experiment lends support to the theory that the chemical precursors of life can be formed in space, triggered by the stream of protons flowing from the Sun.

Item: Also in 1961, Dr. Carl Sagan of the University of California conducted an experiment in which he simulated the atmosphere of Jupiter (hydrogen, helium, ammonia, and methane at about minus 200° F) and subjected the gas mixture to ultraviolet light and electrical discharges. Simple organic compounds were formed. Dr. Sagan postulates that an “organic rain” may be falling from Jupiter’s atmosphere into a planet-wide ammonia ocean, giving rise to the possibility that living creatures may have evolved there.

Item: The most startling news of all comes from two teams of American researchers. They

have found impressive evidence of living cells inside meteorites! This means that not only the “precursor” steps of life have taken place in these meteorites, but that actual living forms have evolved in them.

DR. Frederick D. Sisler and Dr. Walter Newton announced from the National Institute of Health laboratories in Maryland early in 1961 their discovery of bacteria-like “particles” in the Murray meteorite—the same chunk of carbonaceous stone in which Dr. Calvin found the cytosine-like material. The “particles” grew and multiplied when placed in a nutritive salt-water solution, but they did not grow when injected into mice, rats and chickens. Ordinary Earthly bacteria would have thrived in the animals; extra-terrestrial cells would find the environment strange and perhaps even hostile.

A few months after this announcement, Dr. George Claus of New York University Medical Center and Prof. Bartholomew Nagy of Fordham University Department of Chemistry disclosed that they had found fossilized remains of once-living cells in two other carbonaceous meteorites. These cells “resembled, but were not identical to” certain types of earthly algae that live in water. The two mete-

orites in which they were found fell in Orgueil, France, in 1864, and in Ivuna, Central Africa, in 1889.

As a countercheck against the possibility that the once-living cells were Earth-born and contaminated the meteorites after they fell, the investigators examined several other meteorites of various types. In each type they found a few specimens of earthly contaminants (algae, bacteria, etc.). But only in the Orgueil and Ivuna samples were the "extra-terrestrial" forms found. Claus and Nagy included in their tests a sample of the Murray meteorite; they found "poorly defined particles," which conflicts somewhat with the results of Sisler and Newton's experiments.

Orgueil, Ivuna and Murray are all the type of meteorite called *carbonaceous*—rich in carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, sulphur, and in water that has been chemically linked to minerals in the form of hydrates. Carbonaceous meteorites are rare compared to the other metallic and rocky types. Only 19 carbonaceous samples have been discovered over the whole earth.

It is believed that most meteors are escapees from the planetoid (or asteroid) belt—the swarm of minor planets that orbit, for the most part, between Mars and Jupiter. There is, as

yet, no definite theory on how the organic chemicals and cells evolved on these meteorites. Do they represent the first steps of life, taking place on or inside an airless planetoid? Or are they the remains of a higher order of life that once existed on a full-sized planet that was somehow destroyed? No answer.

But, by putting together all the pieces of evidence given above, we can see that there is powerful support for the notion that life can evolve elsewhere than on Earth. The strongest evidence comes from the meteorites, of course, because they are the only representatives of the extra-terrestrial world to visit Earth. Soon, though, rocket technology will reach the point where we can pay visits ourselves. The Moon, Mars and Venus no doubt will have more to tell us than the meteorites.

GAS, DUST, PLANETS AND LIFE

THE problem now is to formulate a single theory that encompasses both the formation of the astronomical bodies of the Solar System—Sun, planets, satellites and all—and the evolution of life on one or more of those bodies. To do this, we must combine the work of the astrophysicists and the biochemists. Obviously, we shall be forced to sketch in only the barest outline of the story. But even a thumbnail

sketch is better than a blank sheet of paper.

The most widely-accepted theory about the evolution of the Solar System pictures the entire complex of bodies developing from a single vast cloud of cool interstellar gas. According to this theory, which has strong observational evidence supporting it, our Solar System was once—some five to ten billion years ago—a tenuous gas cloud, perhaps several light years in diameter. The gas cloud had a tendency to contract, to fall in on itself under the pressure of its own internal gravitational forces. As it began to shrink, it also began to spin; this is a fundamental characteristic of such clouds. Moreover, the shrinking process accelerated with time, and as the contraction became more pronounced the spinning became constantly faster.

Before long (on an astronomical time scale) the cloud must have become thick enough to form solid particles, consisting of many gas atoms linked together. Astronomers call such particles "interstellar dust." They have photographed many such dust globules in distant nebula today. The supposition is that the globules are proto-stars—clouds of dust that are in the process of forming new stars.

Most of the matter in our cloud sank in to the center of the

shrinking, rotating system. But thanks to the innate viscosity of the gas, eddies appeared and developed secondary concentrations of matter. The central concentration eventually became the Sun; the secondary concentrations formed swarms of solid particles that tended to collide with each other, stick together, and slowly aggregate into planetary-sized bodies. We can see on the practically-changeless face of the Moon the results of this primeval traffic pattern.

The original gas cloud was composed almost entirely of hydrogen, with a smattering of helium. There were also traces of heavier elements, among them oxygen, nitrogen and carbon, which had been "manufactured" in older stars and spewed into space when these stars erupted in flares, novae and supernovae.

Slowly, the gathering mass of material in the proto-Sun increased the pressure and temperature at the center of the huge, growing sphere. The weight of some 10^{27} tons of matter caused the whole sphere to begin to glow with the heat generated by gravitational contraction. Finally, the interior of the proto-Sun reached a critical temperature of about 40,000,000°F. The hydrogen atoms began to fuse into helium and liberate a tremendous flow of energy. Sol was a proto-Sun no more. A new star had appeared.

PRIOR to the "turning on" of the solar power-plant, all of the proto-planets were probably at much the same temperature and had developed in essentially the same way. They all contained small amounts of solid substances, mantled in thick atmospheres of hydrogen. All the planets, Earth included, no doubt resembled the present-day giant Jupiter. But then the Sun became a star. The planets felt a wave of heat sweep across the Solar System. The inner planets—Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars—found most of their material evaporating off into space, literally boiled away by the Sun's heat.

All that remained of the inner planets were the heavier elements that could stay gravitationally tethered to the planets despite the sudden increase in temperature. Thus the inner planets became small and dense. Even the outer planets—Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune—must have been affected somewhat by the Sun's radiation, but thanks to their greater distances, they managed to retain most of their original material, and thus remained giants, vastly unlike their terrestrial cousins. (We do not know how Pluto evolved, simply because we know next to nothing about Pluto. The suspicion is, however, that Pluto was once a satellite of Neptune that

escaped and set up its own planetary orbit.)

This description of the evolution of the Solar System is admittedly an over-simplification; it ignores many interesting, perplexing problems that we haven't the space to consider here. We shall concentrate our efforts on trying to understand how the conditions for life may have come about as an integral part of this development of the Solar System.

You recall that the original gas cloud was composed of hydrogen, with traces of oxygen, nitrogen and carbon among other heavier elements. As the cloud condensed and the atoms began to combine into molecules and larger particles of dust, some of their combinations must have resulted in simple molecules that are vital for life—water, carbon dioxide, ammonia.

The first faltering steps of chemical evolution might well have taken place in that swirling cloud of interstellar dust. But what was needed to build really complex molecules was a source of energy. Once the Sun began to shine, the energy source was abundantly available. Chemical evolution, aided by autocatalysis, swung into high gear.

BUT there is a flaw in the picture. For although solar energy will cause simple molecules to build into constantly larger,

more complicated ones, there comes a point where the whole process breaks down. Molecules of a certain complexity, when they receive more energy, do not increase their size any further but instead tend to break down into simpler substances. Thus it seems that molecules of a moderate complexity can be formed under the stimulus of solar radiation. But these molecules must be shielded from the Sun if they are to build up into the tremendously complicated structures that we know as DNA and proteins.

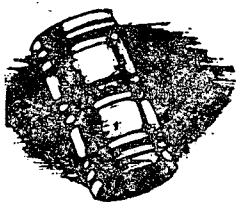
And there were many places where the moderately-complex molecules could find protection from the Sun—beneath a heavy, cloudy atmosphere (Venus, Jupiter); within porous, water-bearing rocks (the carbonaceous planetoids); in the warm seas of a planet like Earth. We know that on Earth, the molecules continued the process of chemical evolution and eventually developed into living things. Biological evolution began and, once it started, chemical evolution could never appear again: the living molecules immediately seized on the simpler organic compounds as sources of sustaining energy.

The Earth's oceans, which had been an "organic soup" just prior to the development of living

forms, were quickly depleted of edible material. Newborn life on Earth faced its first crisis—a food shortage. One type of molecule developed the ability to make its own food from simple chemical compounds by using the energy of sunlight. The chlorophyll trick—photosynthesis—assured life a permanent place on Earth. The next major development was the evolution of cells. Compared to even the highly-complex DNA molecule, a living cell is as complicated as a modern metropolis. But the story from amoeba to man is the province of biological evolution, and need not concern us here.

As we have seen, there is evidence that chemical evolution led to the formation of living cells on other bodies of the Solar System. The necessary conditions almost certainly exist on Mars, Venus and Jupiter. And we have already been visited by extra-terrestrial life forms aboard the carbonaceous meteorites.

It appears sure that life is, indeed, an integral part of the Solar System. But the Sun is only one star out of a hundred billion in the Milky Way. And our galaxy is only one of billions. In our next—and final—article in this series, we will look at the probabilities of planetary systems—and life—circling stars.



Conclusion

A TRACE OF MEMORY

Synopsis of Parts One and Two

MY name's Legion. I was down on my luck when I met Foster—a nice guy with delusions: He claimed he was being pursued—by mysterious lights. He didn't know why. He'd lost his memory in 1918, at the apparent age of thirty. That would make him seventy-five at least—but he looked thirty-five. He wanted me to help him uncover his past.

He showed me a book; most of which was in code; the part I could read seemed to be a journal; it didn't seem to mean much. I told Foster so. He said he thought it held the key to his past—but before he could get around to explaining what it was all about, he had an attack—and woke up with no recollection of me; the book—or anything else.

And not only that—overnight he had become younger; he had the face of a kid of eighteen. . .

Then I discovered the police were looking for me. I was the last one seen with Foster—and he had disappeared. Foul play was feared; I was wanted on suspicion of murder. Foster was my alibi, but he couldn't pass as himself, even if he'd known who he was. I was stuck. I had to help him recover his past—if only to clear myself.

By luck, I discovered the key to a second part of the book, engraved in a scratch on the cover. It told a tale of a man pursued by "Hunters". The location of their "nest" was given—more or less. We worked over the clues, studied a globe and some maps—



By KEITH LAUMER

Illustrated by BIRMINGHAM



and came up with the Pit of the Hunters.

Stonehenge.

We faked up papers, worked our passage to England, and spent a couple of weeks nosing about the ancient megalithic monument. We drew a blank. Then a tavern keeper told us about a skeleton that had been unearthed there, long ago. There had been a ring on its finger—a ring the twin of Foster's.

THE publican showed us the spot, late that night—and we stumbled into a horde of what looked like luminous globes—the same kind Foster had told me had attacked him in the past. We fought them off—a strong beam of light from a flashlight was enough to destroy one. Then we investigated the hole in the ground they came from.

We found an underground room crammed with electronic gear—and I pushed a button. Back on the surface, we watched a vessel descend, summoned by that button.

Fighter planes attacked the ship; we ran for shelter in it; Foster tried a lever. Under automatic control the ship took off, headed for deep space. At thirty thousand miles it rendezvoused with a mother ship, a vast black shape. We explored the giant vessel, discovered human skeletons, strange apparatus—and a supply

of what we termed 'briefing rods'. Held to the temple, they created hallucinations. One, shaped to fit the head, seemed to be a general background briefing. Foster tried it. He awoke with a knowledge of the world the ship had come from—Vallon, he called it—the language, the use of the machines—but no knowledge of his own past.

But we discovered that he could now read the third section of the journal—the portion written in alien characters. From it we learned that the writer of the journal—whom by now we had accepted as being Foster himself, his real name being Qulqlan—had awakened once before aboard this same ship—memoryless. The crew was dead. One man, badly wounded, lived. He was a friend of Qulqlan, named Ammaerln. As was customary, Qulqlan, or Foster, recorded the man's memory. Then the "hunters", the luminous creatures used on Vallon to track fugitives, attacked. Driven to the life boat Foster descended with the wounded man to the surface of the strange world below. The man died and Foster buried him. Then he was seized by savages, one of whom entered the lifeboat and by accident triggered its controls. His only means of escape gone, Foster lived among the natives and rose to be their king. In time the Hunters picked up the trail and Foster fled. Living out the long life of a Vallonian,

he crossed the Atlantic, in time assumed the name and identity under which I had met him.

The long Vallonian life had its drawbacks: periodically the memory required reinforcement in a 'personality reinforcement' machine. Lacking this, a Vallonian suffered amnesia after a century or two. New memories accumulated and in time they in turn were lost. In an attempt to maintain his awareness of his past, Foster had kept the journal. But over the years the key to its language was lost. Now Foster had his history again—back to a certain distance.

WITH his background recovered, if not his individual memory, Foster returned to Vallon aboard the ship. I stayed behind—but with the lifeboat and a cargo of advanced scientific devices.

Three good years passed. Then the FBI swooped. I was, it appeared, guilty of being in possession of information that was classified Ultra Top Secret. When the Russians got into the act, I became the pawn in a game of international tug-of-war. In an attempt to salvage something from my Vallonian trove, I used the background briefing device, the same one that had given Foster a complete picture of Vallonian life. I escaped from protective custody, made my way to the hid-

den lifeboat, and headed for Vallon until things cooled off. My only remaining ties with Earth were a stray cat named Itzenca and a .38 pistol.

I arrived on Vallon—and was promptly enslaved by a feudal-type baron. Using my skill as a clarinetist I made my way up to the rank of Piper, and endeared myself to Owner Gope, my master; not a bad fellow, once you got used to being his property. It seemed that things had changed since Foster's day, some three thousand years earlier. And of him, there was no trace.

I started out in the company of Owner Gope and a party of his retainers to visit the nearby estate of Bar-Ponderone. Pirates attacked us and gave chase. I took the wheel from the panicked driver—but it looked hopeless. The pirates were gaining.

THE other car gained. I held the speed bar against the dash but we were up against a faster car; it was a hundred yards behind us, then fifty, then pulling out to go alongside. I slowed imperceptibly, let him get his front wheels past us, then cut sharply. Here was a clash of wheel fairings, and I fought the tiller as we rebounded from the heavier car. He crept forward, almost alongside again; shoulder to shoulder we raced at ninety-five down the steep grade . . .

I hit the brakes and cut hard to the left, slapped his right rear wheel, slid back. He braked too; that was a mistake. The heavy car lost traction, sliding. In slow motion, off-balanced in a skid, it rose on its nose, ploughing up a cloud of dust. The hamper whirled away, the cloak fluttered and was gone, then the pirate car seemed to float for an instant in air, before it dropped, wheels up, out of sight over the sheer cliff. We raced alone down the slope and out onto the wooded plain toward the towers of Bar-Ponderone.

A shout went up; Owner Gope leaned forward to pound my back. "By the nine eyes of the Hill Devil!" he bellowed, "masterfully executed! The prince of pipers is a prince of drivers too! This night you'll sit by my side at the ringboard at Bar-Ponderone in the rank of a hundred-lash Chief Driver, I swear it!"

I SPENT the first day at Bar-Ponderone rubbernecking the tall buildings and keeping an eye open for Foster, on the off chance that I might pass him on the street. By sunset I was no wiser than before. Dressed in the latest in Vallonian cape and ruffles, I was sitting with my drinking buddy Cagu; Chief Bodyguard to Owner Gope, at a small table on the first terrace at the Palace of Merrymaking, Bar-Ponder-

one's biggest community feasting hall. It looked like a Hollywood producer's idea of a twenty-first century night club, complete with nine dance floors on five levels, indoor pools, fountains, two thousand tables, musicians, girls, noise, colored lights, plenty of booze, and food fit for an Owner. It was open to all fifty-lash-and over good-men of the estate and to guests of equivalent rank.

Cagu was a morose-looking old cuss, but good-hearted. His face was cut and scarred from a thousand encounters with other bodyguards and his nose had been broken so often that it was invisible in profile.

"Where do you manage to get in all the fights, Cagu?" I asked him. "I've known you for three months, and I haven't seen a blow struck in anger yet."

Cagu finished off an oily greenish drink and signalled for another.

"Here." He grinned, showing me some broken front teeth. "Swell places, these big Estates, good Drgon; lotsa action."

"What do you do, get in street fights?"

"Nah. The boys show up down here, tank-up, cruise around, you know."

"They start fights here in the dining room?"

"Sure. Good crowd here; lotsa laughs."

I PICKED up my drink, raised it to Cagu—and got it in my lap as somebody jostled my arm. I looked up. A battle-scarred thug stood over me.

"Who's a punk, Cagu?" he said in a hoarse whisper.

Cagu took a pull on a fresh drink, put the glass down, stood up, and threw a punch to the other plug-ugly's paunch. He oofed, clinched, eyed me resentfully over Cagu's shoulder. Cagu pushed him away, held him at arm's length.

"Howsa boy, Mull?" he said. Lay offa my sidekick; greatest little piper ina business, and a top driver too. How about a drink?"

"Sure." Mull rubbed his stomach, sat down beside me. "Ya losin' your punch, Cagu." He looked at me. "Sorry about the booze in the lap. I thought you was one of the guys." He signalled a passing waiter-slave. "Bring my friend a new suit, and a shot. Make it snappy."

"Don't the customers kind of resent it when you birds stage a heavyweight bout in the aisle?" I asked.

"Nah; we move down into the Spot." He waved a thumb in the general direction of somewhere else. He looked me over. "Where ya been, piper? Your first time ina Palace?"

"Drgon's been travelling," said Cagu. "He's okay. Lemee

tell ya the time these pirates pull one, see . . ."

Cagu and Mull swapped lies while I worked on my drinking. Although I hadn't learned anything on my day's looking around at Bar-Ponderone, it was still a better spot for snooping than Rath-Gallion. There were two major cities on the Estate and scores of villages. Somewhere among the population I might have better luck finding someone to talk history with . . . or someone who knew Foster.

"Hey!" growled Mull. "Look who's comin'."

I followed his gaze. Three thick-set thugs swaggered up to the table. One of them, a long-armed gorilla at least seven feet tall, reached out, took Cagu and Mull by the backs of their necks, and cracked their skulls together. I jumped up, ducked a hoof-like fist . . . and saw a beautiful burst of fireworks followed by soothing darkness.

I FUMBLED in the dark with lengths of cloth entangling my legs, sat up and cracked my head—

I groaned, freed a leg from the chair rungs, groped my way out from under the table. A waiter-slave helped me up, dusted me off. The seven-foot lout lolling in a chair glanced my way, nodded.

"You shouldn't hang out with lugs like that Mull," he said. "Gagu told me you was just a piper, but the way you come outa that chair—" He shrugged, turned back to whatever he was watching.

I checked a few elbow and knee joints, worked my jaw, tried my neck: all okay.

"You the one that slugged me?" I asked.

"Huh? Yeah."

I stepped over to his chair, picked a spot, and cleared my throat. "Hey, you," I said. He turned, and I put everything I had behind a straight right to the point of the jaw. He went over, feet in the air, flipped a rail, and crashed down between two tables below. I leaned over the rail. A party of indignant tally-clerks stared up at me.

A shout went up from the floor some distance away. I looked. In a cleared circle two levels below a pair of heavy-shouldered men were slugging it out. One of them was Gagu. I watched, saw his opponent fall. Another man stepped in to take his place. I turned and made my way down to the ringside.

Gagu exchanged haymakers with two more opponents before he folded and was hauled from the ring. I propped him up in a chair, fittet a drink into his fist, and watched the boys pound each other. It was easy to see

why the scarred face was the sign of their craft; there was no defensive fighting whatever. They stood toe-to-toe and hit as hard as they could, until one collapsed. It wasn't fancy, but the fans loved it. Gagu came to after a while and filled me in on the fighters' backgrounds.

"So they're all top boys," he said. "But it ain't like in the old days when I was in my prime. I could've took any three of these bums. The only one maybe I woulda had a little trouble with is Torbu."

"Which one is he?"

"He ain't down there yet; he'll show to take on the last boys on their feet."

More gladiators pushed their way to the Spot, downed drinks, pulled off gaily-patterned cloaks and weskits, and waded in.

After an hour the waiting line had dwindled away to nothing.

"Where's Torbu?"

"Maybe he didn't come to-night," I said.

"Sure, you met him; he knocked you under the table."

"Oh, him?"

"Where'd he go?"

"The last I saw he was asleep on the floor," I said.

"Hozzat?"

"I didn't much like him slugging me. I clobbered him one."

"Hey!" yelled Gagu. His face lit up. He got to his feet and floored the closest fighter, turned

and laid out the other. He raised both hands above his head.

"Rath-Gallion gotta champion," he bellowed. "Rath-Gallion takes on all comers." He turned, waved to me. 'Our boy, Drgon, he —"

THERE was a bellow behind me, even louder than Cagu's. I turned, saw Torbu, his hair mussed, his face purple, pushing through the crowd.

"Jussa crummy minute," he yelled. "I'm the champion around here—" He aimed a haymaker at Cagu; Cagu ducked.

"Our boy, Drgon, laid you out cold, right?" he shouted. "So now he's the champion."

"I wasn't set." Bawled Torbu. "A lucky punch."

"Come on down, Drgon," Cagu called, waving to me again. "We'll show —" Torbu turned and slammed a roundhouse right to the side of Cagu's jaw; the old fighter hit the floor hard, skidded, lay still. I got to my feet. They pulled him to the nearest table, hoisted him into a chair. I made my way down to the little clearing in the crowd. A man bending over Cagu straightened, face white. I pushed him aside, grabbed the bodyguard's wrist. There was no pulse. Cagu was dead.

Torbu stood in the center of the Spot, mouth open. "What . . .?" he started. I pushed be-

tween two fans, went for him. He saw me, crouched, swung out at me.

I ducked, uppercut him. He staggered back. I pressed him, threw lefts and rights to the body, ducked under his wild swings, then rocked his head left and right. He stood, knees together, eyes glazed, hands down. I measured him, right-crossed his jaw; he dropped like a log.

Panting, I looked across at Cagu. His scarred face, white as wax, was strangely altered now; it looked peaceful. I took a bottle from a waiter-slave, poured out a stiff drink, then a couple more. Somebody helped Torbu to his feet, walked him to the ringside. I had another drink. It had been a big evening. Now all I had to do was take the body home . . .

I went over to where Cagu was laid out on the floor. Shocked people stood around staring. Torbu was on his knees beside the body. A tear ran down his nose, dripped on Cagu's face. Torbu wiped it away with a big scarred hand.

"I'm sorry, old friend," he said. "I didn't mean it, you know I didn't."

I picked Cagu up and got him over my shoulder, and all the way to the far exit it was so quiet in the Palace of Merry-making that I could hear my own heavy breathing.

IN the bodyguards' quarters I laid Cagu out on the bunk, then faced the dozen scowling bruisers who stared down at the still body.

"Cagu was a good man," I said. "Now he's dead. He died like an animal . . . for nothing."

Mull glowered at me. "You talk like we was to blame," he said. "Cagu was my compeer too."

"Whose pal was he a thousand years ago?" I snapped. "What was he—once? What were you? Vallon wasn't always like this. There was a time when every man was his own Owner—"

"Look, you ain't of the Brotherhood—" one thug started.

"So that's what you call it? But it's just another name for an old racket. A big shot sets himself up as dictator—"

"We got our Code," Mull said. "Our job is to stick up for the Owner . . . and that don't mean standing around listening to some japester callin' names."

"Names, hell," I snapped. "I'm talking rebellion. You boys have all the muscle and most of the guts in this organization. Why let the boss live off the fat while you murder each other for the amusement of the patrons? You had a birthright . . . once. But it's up to you to collect it . . . before more of you go the way Cagu did."

There was an angry mutter. Torbu came in, face swollen.

"Hold it, you birds," Torbu said. "What's goin' on?"

"This guy! He's talkin' revolt and treason," somebody said.

"He wants we should pull some rough stuff—on Owner Qohey hisself."

Torbu came up to me. "You're a stranger around Bar-Ponder-one. Cagu said you was okay. You worked me over pretty good . . . and I got no hard feelin's; that's the breaks. But don't try to start no trouble here. We got our Code and our Brotherhood. We look out for each other; that's good enough for us. Owner Qohey ain't no worse than any other Owner . . . and by the Code, we'll stand by him!"

"Listen to me," I said. "I know the history of Vallon: I know what you were once and what you could be again. All you have to do is take over the power. I can lead you to the ship I came here in. There are briefing rods aboard, enough to show you—"

"That's enough," Torbu broke in. He made a cabalistic sign in the air. "We ain't gettin' mixed up in no tabu ghost-boats or takin' on no magicians and demons—"

"Hog wash! That tabu routine is just a gag to keep you away from the cities so you won't discover what you're missing—"

"I don't wanna hafta take you to the Greymen, Drgon," Torbu growled. "Leave it lay."

"These cities," I ploughed on. "They're standing there, empty, as perfect as the day they were built. And you live in these flea-bitten quarters, jammed inside the town walls, so the Greymen and renegades won't get you."

"You wanna runs things here?" Mull put in. "Go see Qohey."

"Let's all go see Qohey!" I said.

"That's something you'll have to do alone," said Torbu. "You better move on, Drgon. I ain't turnin' you in; I know how you felt about Cagu gettin' killed and all—but don't push it too far."

I knew I was licked. They were as stubborn as a team of mules—and just about as smart.

TORBU motioned; I followed him outside.

"You wanna turn things upside-down, don't you? I know how it is; you ain't the first guy to get ideas. We can't help you. But we got a legend: someday the Rthr will come back . . . and then the Good Time will come back too."

"What's the Rthr?" I said.

"Kinda like a big-shot Owner. There ain't no Rthr now. But a long time ago, back when our first lives started, there was a Rthr that was Owner of all Val-

lon, and everybody lived high, and had all their lives . . . it's kind of like a hope we got—that's what we're waitin' for through all our lives."

"Okay," I said. "Dream on, big boy. And while you're treasuring your rosy dreams you'll get your brains kicked out, like Cagu." I turned away.

"Listen, Drgon. It's no good buckin' the system: it's too big for one guy . . . or even a bunch of guys . . . but—"

I looked up. "Yeah?"

". . . if you gotta stick your neck out—see Owner Gope." Abruptly Torbu turned and pushed back through the door.

See Owner Gope, huh? Okay, what did I have to lose?

I STOOD in the middle of the deep-pile carpet in Gope's suite, trying to keep my temper hot enough to supply the gall I needed to bust in on an Owner in the middle of the night. He sat in his ceremonial chair and stared at me impassively.

"With your help or without it," I said, "I'm going to find the answers."

"Yes, good Drgon," he said, not bellowing for once. "I understand. But there are matters you don't understand."

"I understand too much," I snapped. "Do you remember Cagu? Maybe you remember him as a newman, young, handsome,

like a god out of some old legend. You've seen him live his life. Was it a good life? Did the promise of youth ever get paid off? And what about yourself? Don't you ever wonder what you might have been . . . back in the Good Time?"

"Who are you?" asked Gope, his eyes fixed on mine. "You speak Old Vallonian, you rake up the forbidden knowledge, and challenge the very Powers . . ." He got to his feet. "I could have you immured, Drgon. I could hand you to the Grey-men, for a fate I shudder to name." He turned and walked the length of the room restlessly, then turned back to me and stopped.

"Matters stand ill with this fair world," he said. "Legend tells us that once men lived as the High Gods on Vallon. There was a mighty Owner, Rthr of all Vallon. It is whispered that he will come again—"

"Your legends are all true. You can take my word for that! But that doesn't mean some supernatural sugar daddy is going along and bail you out. And don't get the idea I think I'm the fabled answer to prayers. All I mean is that once upon a time Vallon was a good place to live and it could be again. Your cities and roads and ships are still here, intact. But nobody knows how to run them and you're all afraid to try. Who scared you

off? What broke down the memory recording system? Why can't we all go to Okk-Hamilo and use the Archives to give everybody back what he's lost—"

"These are dread words," said Gope.

"There must be somebody behind it. Or there was once. Who is he?"

G OPE thought. "There is one man pre-eminent among us: the Great Owner, Owner of Owners: Ommodurad by name. Where he dwells I know not. This is a secret possessed only by his intimates."

"What does he look like? How do I get to see him?"

Gope shook his head. "I have seen him but once, closely cowed. He is a tall man, and silent. 'Tis said—" Gope lowered his voice, "—by his black arts he possesses all his lives. An aura of dread hangs all about him—"

"Never mind that jazz," I said. How can I get close to him?"

"There are those Owners who are his confidants," said Gope, "his trusted agents. It is through them that we small Owners learn of his will."

"Can we enlist one of them?"

"Never. They are bound to him by ties of darkness, spells, and incantations."

"I'm a fast man with a pair

of loaded dice myself. It's all done with mirrors. Let's stick to the point. How can I work into a spot with one of these big shots?"

"Nothing easier. A driver and piper of such skills as your own can claim whatever place he chooses."

"Now about bodyguarding? Suppose I could take a heavy named Torbu; would that set me in better with a new Owner?"

"Such is no place for a man of your abilities, good Drgon," Gope exclaimed. "True, 'tis a place most close to an Owner, but there is much danger in it. The challenge involves the most bloody hand-to-hand combat, second only to the rigors of a challenge to an Owner himself."

"What's that?" I snapped. "Challenge an Owner?"

"Be calm, good Drgon," said Gope, staring at me incredulously. "No common man with his wits about him will challenge an Owner. He is a warrior trained in the skills of battle. None less than another such may hope to prevail."

I smacked my fist into my palm. "I should have thought of this sooner! The cooks cook for their places, the pipers pipe . . . and the best man wins. It figures that the Owners would use the same system. But what's the procedure? How do you get your

chance to prove who can own the best?"

It is a contest with naked steel. It is the measure and glory of an Owner that he alone stands ready to prove his quality against the peril of death itself." Gope drew himself up with pride.

"What Owner can I challenge? How do I go about it? What's the procedure?"

"Give up this course, good Drgon—"

"Where's the nearest buddy of the Big Owner?"

Gope threw up his hands. "Here, at Bar-Ponderone. Owner Qohey. But—"

"And how do I call his bluff?" I asked.

Gope put a hand on my shoulder. "It is no bluff, good Drgon. It is long now since last Owner Qohey stood to his blade to protect his place, but you may be sure he has lost none of his skill. Thus it was he won his way to Bar-Ponderone, while lesser knights, such as myself, contented themselves with meaner fiefs."

"I'm not bluffing either, noble Gope," I said, stretching a point. "I was no harness-maker in the Good Time."

Gope sat down heavily, raised his hand, and let them fall. "If I tell you not, another will. But I will not soon find another piper of your worth."

GAUDY hangings of purple cut the light of the sun to a rich gloom in the enormous, high-vaulted Audience Hall. A rustling murmur was audible in the room as uneasy courtiers and supplicants fidgeted, waiting for the appearance of the Owner.

It had been two months since Gope had explained to me how a formal challenge to an Owner was conducted, and, as he pointed out, this was the only kind of challenge that would help. If I waylaid the man and cut him down, even in a fair fight, his bodyguards would repay the favor before I could establish the claim that I was their legitimate new boss.

I had spent three hours every day in the armory at Rath-Gallion, trading buffets with Gope and a couple of the bodyguards. The thirty-pound slab of edged steel had felt right at home in my hand that first day—for about a minute. I had the borrowed knowledge to give me all the technique I needed, but the muscle power for putting the knowledge into practice was another matter. After five minutes I was slumped against the wall, gulping air, while Gope whistled his sticker around my head and talked.

"You laid on like no piper, good Drgon. Yet have you much

to learn in the matter of endurance."

After surviving two months of Gope's training I felt ready for anything. Gope had warned me that Owner Qohey was a big fellow, but that didn't bother me. The bigger they came, the bigger the target . . .

There was a murmur in a different key in the Audience Hall and tall gilt doors opened at the far side of the room. A couple of liveried flunkies scampered into view, then a seven-foot man-eater stalked into the hall, made his way to the dias, turned to face the crowd . . .

He was enormous: his neck was as thick as my thigh, his features chipped out of granite, the grey variety. He threw back his brilliant purple cloak from his shoulders and reached out for the ceremonial sword one of the flunkies was struggling with; his arm was like an oak root. He took the sword with its sheath, sat down, and stood it between his feet, his arms folded on top.

WHO has a grievance?" he spoke. The voice reverberated like the old Wurlitzer at the Rialto back home.

This was my cue. There he was, just asking for it. All I had to do was speak up. Owner Qohey would gladly oblige me.

I cleared my throat with a

thin squeak, and edged forward, not very far.

"I have one little item—" I started.

Nobody was listening. Up front a big fellow in a black toga was pushing through the crowd. Everybody turned to stare at him, there was a craning of necks. The crowd drew back from the dias leaving an opening. The man in black stepped into the clear, flung back the flapping garment from his right arm, and whipped out a long polished length of razor-edged iron. It was beginning to look like somebody had beaten me to the punch.

The newcomer stood there in front of Qohey with the naked blade making all the threat that was needed. Qohey stared at him for a long moment, then stood, gestured to a flunky. The flunky turned, cleared his throat.

"The place of Bar-Ponderone has been claimed!" he recited in a shrill voice. "Let the issue be joined!" He skittered out of the way and Qohey rose, threw aside his purple cloak and cowl, and stepped down. I pushed forward to get a better look.

The challenger in black tossed his loose garment aside, stood facing Qohey in a skin-tight jerkin and hose; heavy moccasins of soft leather were laced up the calf. He was magnificently muscled but Qohey was bigger.

Qohey unsheathed his fancy iron and whirled it up overhead, made a few practice swipes. He handled it like it was a lady's putter. I felt sorry for the smaller man, who was just standing, watching him. He really didn't have a chance.

I had got through to the fore rank by now. The challenger turned and I saw his face. I stopped dead, while fire bells clanged in my head.

The man in black was Foster.

IN dead silence Qohey and Foster squared off, touched their sword points to the floor in some kind of salute . . . and Qohey's slicer whiped up in a vicious cut. Foster leaned aside, just far enough, then countered with a flick that made Qohey jump back. I let out a long breath and tried swallowing.

Qohey's blade flashed, cutting at Foster's head. Foster hardly moved. Almost effortlessly, it seemed, he interposed his heavy weapon between the attacking steel and himself. Clash, clang! Qohey hacked and chopped . . . and Foster played with him. Then Foster's arm flashed out and there was blood on Qohey's wrist. A gasp went up from the crowd. Now Foster took a step forward, struck . . . and faltered! In an instant Qohey was on him and the two men were locked, chest to chest. For a

moment Foster held, then Qohey's weight told, and Foster reeled back. He tried to bring up the sword, seemed to struggle, then Qohey lashed out again. Foster twisted, took the blow awkwardly just above the hand guard, stumbled . . . and fell.

Qohey leaped to him, raised the sword—

I hauled mine half way out of its sheath and pushed forward.

"Let the man be put away from my sight," rumbled Qohey. He lowered his immense sword, turned, pushed aside a flunky who had bustled up with a wad of bandages. As he strode from the room a swarm of bodyguards fanned out between the crowd and Foster. I could see him clumsily struggling to rise, then I was shoved back, still craning for a glimpse. There was something wrong here; Foster had acted like a man suddenly half-paralyzed. Had Qohey doped him in some way?

The cordon stopped pushing. I tugged at the arm of the bodyguard beside me. "What's to be the fate of the man?" I asked.

"They're gonna immure him."

"You mean wall him up?"

"Yeah. Just a peep hole to pass chow in every day . . . so's he don't starve, see?"

"How long—?"

"He'll last; don't worry. After the Change, Owner Qohey's got a newman—"

"Shut up," another bruiser said.

THE crowd was slowly thinning. The bodyguards were relaxing, standing in pairs talking. Two servants moved about where the fight had taken place, making mystical motions in the air above the floor. I edged forward, watching them. They seemed to be plucking imaginary flowers.

I moved even farther forward to take a closer look, then saw a tiny glint . . . A servant hurried across, made gestures. I pushed him aside, groped . . . and my fingers encountered a delicate filament of wire. I pulled it in, swept up more. The servants had stopped and stood watching me, muttering. The whole area of the combat was covered with the invisible wires, looping up in coils two feet high.

No wonder Foster had stumbled, had trouble raising his sword. He had been netted, encased in a mesh of incredibly fine tough wire . . . and in the dim light even the crowd twenty feet away hadn't seen it. I put my hand on my sword hilt, chewed my lower lip. I had found Foster . . . but it wouldn't do me—or Vallon—much good. He was on his way to the dungeons, to be walled up until the next Change. And it would be three months before I could legally make another try for Qohey's place.

I would have to spend that time working on my swordplay, and hope Foster could hold out. Maybe I could sneak a message—

A heavy blow on the back sent me spinning. Four bodyguards moved to ring me in, clubs in hand. They were strangers to me, but across the room I saw Torbu looming, looking my way . . .

"I saw him; he started to pull that fancy sword," said one of the guards.

"He was asking me questions—"

"Unbuckle it and drop it," another ordered me. "Don't try anything!"

"What's this all about?" I said. "I have a right to wear a Ceremonial Sword at an Audience—"

"Move in, boys!" The four men stepped toward me, the clubs came up. I warded off a smashing blow with my left arm, took a blinding crack across the face, felt myself going down—another blow, and another: all killing ones . . .

Then I was aware of being dragged, endlessly, of voices barking sharp questions, of pain . . . After a long time it was dark, and silent, and I slept.

I GROANED and the sound was dead, muffled. I put out a hand and touched stone on my right. My left elbow touched stone. I

made an instinctive move to sit up and smacked my head against more stone. My new room was confining. I felt my face . . . and winced at the touch. The bridge of my nose felt different: it was lower than it used to be, in spite of the swelling. I lay back and traced the pattern of pain. There was the nose—smashed flat—with secondary aches around the eyes. They'd be beautiful shiners, if I could see them. Now the left arm: it was curled close to my side and when I moved it I saw why: it wasn't broken, but the shoulder wasn't right, and there was a deep bruise above the elbow. My knees and shin, as far as I could reach, were caked with dried blood. That figured: I remembered being dragged.

I tried deep-breathing; my chest seemed to be okay. My hands worked. My teeth were in place. Maybe I wasn't as sick as I felt.

But where the hell was I? The floor was hard, cold. I needed a big soft bed and a little soft nurse and a hot meal and a cold drink . . .

Foster! I cracked my head again and flopped back, groaned some more. It still sounded pretty dead.

I swallowed, licked my lips, felt a nice split that ran down to the bristles. I had attended the Audience clean-shaven. Quite a

few hours have passed since then. They had taken Foster away to immure him, somebody said. Then the guards had tapped me, worked me over—

Immured! I got a third crack on the head. Suddenly it was hard to breathe. I was walled up, sealed away from the light, buried under the foundations of the giant towers of Bar-Ponderone. I felt their crushing weight . . .

I forced myself to relax, breathe deep. Being immured wasn't the same as being buried alive—not exactly. This was the method these latter-day Vallonians had figured out to effectively end a man's life . . . without ending all his lives. They figured to keep me neatly packaged here until my next Change, thus acquiring another healthy newman for the kitchen or the stables. They didn't know the only Change that would happen to me was death.

They'd have to feed me; that meant a hole. I ran my fingers along the rough stone, found an eight-inch square opening on the left wall, just under the ceiling. I reached through it, felt nothing but the solidness of its thick sides. How far along the other open end was I had no way of determining.

I was feeling dizzy. I lay back and tried to think, but everything remained fuzzy.

I WAS awake again. There had been a sound. I moved, and felt something hit my chest.

I groped for it; it was a small loaf of hard bread. I heard the sound again and a second object thumped against me.

"Hey!" I yelled, "listen to me! I'll die in here. I'm not like the rest of you; I won't go through a Change. I'll rot here until I die. Do you hear me? . . ."

I listened. The silence was absolute.

"Answer me!" I screamed. "You're making a mistake . . .!"

I gave up when my throat got raw. I felt for the other item that had been pushed in to me. It was a water bottle made of tough plastic. I fumbled the cap off, took a swallow. It wasn't good. I tried the bread; it was tough, tasteless. I lay and chewed and thought. As a world-saver I was a bust. I had come a long long way and now I was going to die in this reeking hole. I had a sudden vision of steaks uneaten, wines undrunk, girls unhad, and life unlivd. And then I had another thought: if I never had them was it going to be because I hadn't tried? Abruptly I was planning. I would keep calm and use my head. I wouldn't wear myself out with screams and struggles. I'd figure the angles, use everything I had to make the best try I could.

First, to explore the tomb-cell.

It hurt to move but that didn't matter. I felt over the walls, estimating size. My chamber was three feet wide, two feet high, and seven feet long. The walls were relatively smooth, except for a few mortar joints. The stones were big: eighteen inches or so by a couple of feet. I scratched at the mortar; it was rock hard.

I wondered how they'd gotten me in. Some of the stones must be newly placed . . . or else there was a door. I couldn't feel anything as far as my hands would reach. Maybe at the other end . . .

I tried to twist around: no go. The people who had built the cage knew just how to dimension it to keep the occupant oriented the way they wanted him. He was supposed to just lie quietly and wait for the bread and water to fall through the hole above his chest.

That was reason enough to change positions. If they wanted me to stay put I'd at least have the pleasure of defying the rules. And there just might be a reason why they didn't want me moving around.

I turned on my side, pulled my legs up, hugged them to my chest, worked my way down . . . and jammed. My skinned knees and shins didn't help any. I inched them higher, wincing at the pain, then braced my hands

against the floor and roof and with all my strength forced my torso toward my feet . . .

Still no go. The rough stone was shredding my back. I moved my knees apart; that eased the pressure a little. I made another inch.

I RESTED, tried to get some air. It wasn't easy: my chest was crushed between my thighs and the stone wall at my back. I breathed shallowly, wondering whether I should go back or try to push on. I tried to move my legs; they didn't like the idea. I might as well go on. It would be no fun either way and if I waited I'd stiffen up, while inactivity and no food and loss of blood would weaken me further every moment. I wouldn't do better next time—not even as well. This was the time. Now.

I set myself, pushed again, I didn't move. I pushed harder, scraping my palms raw against the stone. I was stuck—good. I went limp suddenly. Then I panicked, in the grip of claustrophobia. I snarled, rammed my hands hard against the floor and wall, and heaved—and felt my lacerated back slip along the stone, sliding on a lubricating film of blood. I pushed again, my back curved, doubled; my knees were forced up beside my ears. I couldn't breathe at all now and my spine was breaking. It didn't

matter. I might as well break it, rip off all the hide, bleed to death; I had nothing to lose. I shoved again, felt the back of my head grate; my neck bent, creaking . . . then I was through, stretching out to flop on my back gasping, my head where my feet had been. Score one for our side.

IT took a long time to get my breath back and sort out my various abrasions. My back was worst, then my legs and hands. There was a messy spot on the back of my head and sharp pains shot down my spine, and I was getting tired of breathing through my mouth instead of my smashed nose. Other than that I'd never felt better in my life. I had plenty of room to relax in, I could breathe. All I had to do was rest, and after a while they'd drop some more nice bread and water in to me . . .

I shook myself awake. There was something about the absolute darkness and silence that made my mind want to curl up and sleep, but there was no time for that. If there had been a stone freshly set in mortar to seal the chamber after I had been stuffed inside, this was the time to find it—before it set too hard. I ran my hands over the wall, found the joints. The mortar was dry and hard in the first; in the next . . . Under my fingernail soft mortar crumbled away. I traced

the joint; it ran around a twelve-by-eighteen-inch stone. I raised myself on my elbow, settled down to scratching at it.

Half an hour later I had ten bloody finger tips and a half-inch groove cut around the stone. It was slow work, and I couldn't go much farther without a tool of some sort. I felt for the water bottle, took off the cap, tried to crush it. It wouldn't crush. There was nothing else in the cell.

Maybe the stone would move, mortar and all, if I shoved hard enough. I set my feet against the end wall, my hands against the block, and strained until the blood roared in my ears. No use.

I was lying there, just thinking about it, when I became aware of something. It wasn't a noise exactly. It was more like a fourth-dimensional sound heard inside the brain . . . or the memory of one.

But my next sensation was perfectly real. I felt four little feet walking gravely up my chest toward my chin

It was the cat, Itzenca.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR a while I toyed with the idea of just chalking it up as a miracle. Then I decided it would be a nice problem in probabilities. It had been seven months since we had parted company on the pink terrace at

Okk-Hamiloth. Where would I have gone if I had been a cat? And how could I have found me—my old pal from Earth?

Itzenca exhaled a snuffle in my ear.

"Come to think of it, the stink is pretty strong, isn't it? I guess there's nobody on Valon with quite the same heady fragrance. And what with the close quarters here, the concentration of sweat, blood, and you-name-it must be pretty penetrating."

Itz didn't seem to care. She marched around my head and back again, now and then laid a tentative paw on my nose or chin, and kept up a steady rumbling purr. The feeling of affection I had for that cat right then was close to being one of my life's grand passions. I couldn't keep my hands off her. They roamed over her scrawny frame, fingered again the khaffite collar I had whiled away an hour in fashioning for her aboard the lifeboat—

My head hit the stone wall with a crash I didn't even notice. In ten seconds I had released the collar clasp, pulled the collar from Itzenca's neck, thumbed the stiff khaffite out into a blade about ten inches long, and was scraping at the mortar beyond my head at fever heat.

They had fed me three times

by the time the groove was nine inches deep on all sides of the block, and the mortar had hardened. But I was nearly through, I figured. I took a rest, then made another try at loosening the block. I stuck the blade in the slot, levered gently at the stone. If it was only supported on one edge now, as it would be if it were a little less than a foot thick, it should be about ready to go. I couldn't tell.

I put down my scraper, got in position, and pushed. I wasn't as strong as I had been; there wasn't much force in the push. Again I rested and again I tried. Maybe there was only a thin crust of mortar still holding; maybe one more ounce of pressure would do it. I took a deep breath, strained . . . and felt the block shift minutely.

Now! I heaved again, teeth gritted, drew back my feet, and thrust hard. The stone slid out with a grating sound, dropped half an inch. I paused to listen: all quiet. I shoved again, and the stone dropped with a heavy thud to the floor outside. With no loss of time I pushed through behind it, felt a breath of cooler air, got my shoulders free, pulled my legs through . . . and stood, for the first time in how many days . . .

I HAD already figured my next move. As soon as Itzenca had

stepped out I reached back in, groped for the water bottle, the dry crusts I had been saving, and the wad of bread paste I had made up. I reached a second time for a handful of the powdered mortar I had produced, then lifted the stone. I settled it in place, using the hard bread as supports, then packed the open joint with gummy bread. I dusted it over with dry mortar, then carefully swept up the debris—as well as I could in the total darkness. The bread-and-water man would have a light and he was due in half an hour or so—as closely as I had been able to estimate the time of his regular round. I didn't want him to see anything out of the ordinary. I was counting on finding Foster filed away somewhere in the stacks, and I'd need time to try to release him.

I moved along the corridor, counting my steps, one hand full of bread crumbs and stone dust, the other feeling the wall. There were narrow side branches every few feet; the access ways to the feeding holes. Forty-one paces from my slot I came to a wooden door. It wasn't locked, but I didn't open it. I wasn't ready to use it yet.

I went back, passed my hole, continued nine paces to a blank wall. Then I tried the side branches. They were all seven-foot stubs, dead ends; each had

the eight-inch holes on either side. I called Foster's name softly at each hole . . . but there was no answer. I heard no signs of life, no yells or heavy breathing. Was I the only one here? That wasn't what I had figured on. Foster had to be in one of these delightful bedrooms. I had come across the universe to see him and I wasn't going to leave Bar-Ponderone without him.

It was time to get ready for the bread man. I groped my way into one of the side branches; Itzenca at my heels. With half a year's experience at dodging humans behind her, she could be trusted not to show at the crucial moment, I figured. I had just jettisoned my handful of trash in the backmost corner of the passage when there was a soft grating sound from the door. I flattened myself against the wall.

A light splashed on the floor; it must have been dim but seemed to my eyes like the blaze of noon. Soft footsteps sounded. I held my breath. A man in bodyguard's trappings, basket in hand, moved past the entry of the branch where I stood, went on. I breathed again. Now all I had to do was keep an eye on the feeder, watch where he stopped. I stepped to the corridor, risked a glance, saw him entering a branch farther down the corri-

dor. As he disappeared I made it three branches farther along, ducked out of sight.

I heard him coming back. I flattened myself. He went by me, opened the door. It closed behind him. Darkness, silence and despair settled down once more.

The bread man had stopped at one cell only—mine. Foster wasn't there.

IT was a long wait for the next feeding but I put the time to use. First I had a good nap; I hadn't been getting my rest while I scratched my way out of my nest. I woke up feeling better and started thinking about the next move. The door creaked, and I did a fast fade down a side branch. The guard shuffled into view; now was the time. I moved out—quietly, I thought, and he whirled, dropped the load and bottle, and fumbled at his club hilt. I didn't have a club to slow me down. I went at him, threw a beautiful right, square to the mouth. He went over backwards, with me on top. I heard his head hit with a sound like a length of rubber hose slapping a grapefruit. He didn't move.

I pulled the clothes off him, struggled into them. They didn't fit too well and they probably smelled gamey to anybody who hadn't spent a week where I had, but details like these didn't

count anymore. I tore his sash into strips and tied him. He wasn't dead—quite, but I had reason to know that any yelling he did was unlikely to attract much attention. I hoped he'd enjoy the rest and quiet until the next feeding time. By then I expected to be long gone. I lifted the door open and stepped out into a dimly lit corridor.

With Itzenca abreast of me I moved along in absolute stillness, passed a side corridor, came to a heavy door; locked. We retraced our steps, went down the side hall, found a flight of worn steps, followed them up two flights, and emerged in a dark room. A line of light showed around a door. I went to it, peered through the crack. Two men in stained kitchen-slave tunics fussed over a boiling cauldron. I pushed through the door.

The two looked up, startled. I rounded a littered table, grabbed up a heavy soup ladle, and skulled the nearest cook just as he opened up to yell. The other one, a big fellow, went for a cleaver. I caught him in two jumps, laid him out cold beside his pal.

I found an apron, ripped it up, and tied and gagged the two slaves, then hauled them into a storeroom.

I came back into the kitchen. It was silent now. The room reeked of sour soup. A stack of

unpleasantly familiar loaves stood by the oven. I gave them a kick that collapsed the pile as I passed to pick up a knife. I hacked tough slices from a cold haunch of Vallonian mutton, threw one to Itzenca across the table, and sat and gnawed the meat while I tried to think through my plans.

OWNER Qohey was a big man to tackle but he was the one with the answers. If I could make my way to his apartment and if I wasn't stopped before I'd forced the truth out of him, then I might get to Foster and tell him that if he had the memory playback machine I had the memory, if it hadn't been filched from the bottom of a knapsack aboard a lifeboat parked at Okk-Hamiloth.

Four 'if's' and a 'might'—but it was something to shoot at. My first move would be to locate Qohey's quarters, somewhere in the Palace, and get inside. My bodyguard's outfit was as good a disguise as any for the attempt.

I finished off my share of the meat and got to my feet. I'd have to find a place to clean myself up, shave—

The rear door banged open and two bodyguards came through it, talking loudly, laughing.

"Hey, cook! Set out meat and wine for—"

The heavy in the lead stopped short, gaping at me. I gaped back. It was Torbu.

"Drgon! How did you . . ." He trailed off.

The other bodyguard came past him, looked me over. "You're no Brother of the Guard—" he started.

I reached for the cleaver the kitchen-slave had left on the table, backed against a tall wall cupboard. The bodyguard unlimbered his club.

"Hold it, Blon," said Torbu. "Drgon's okay." He looked at me. "I kind of figured you for done-for, Drgon. The boys worked you over pretty good."

"Yeah," I returned, "and thanks for your help in stopping it. You claim to believe in the system around here. You think it's a great life, all fair play and no holds barred and plenty of goodies for the winner. I know, it was tough about Cagu, but that's life, isn't it? But what about the business I saw in the Audience Hall? You guys try not to think about that angle, is that it?"

"It was the Owner's orders," said Blon. "What was I gonna do, tell him—?"

"Never mind," I said. "I'll tell him myself. That's all I want: just a short interview with the Owner—minus the wire nets."

"Wow . . ." drawled Torbu; "yeah, that'd be a bout." He

turned to Blon. "This guy's got a punch, Blon. He don't look so hot but he could swap buffets with the Fire Drgon he's named after. If he's that good with a long blade—"

"Just lend me one," I said. "and show me the way to his apartment."

"I didn't like the capers with the wires, neither did most of the boys. We're Brothers of the Guard," said Torbu. "We ain't got much but we got our Code. It don't say nothing about wires. If we don't back up our oath to the Brotherhood we ain't no better than slaves." He turned to me. "Come on, Drgon. We'll take you to the Guardroom so you can clean up and put on a good blade. If you're gonna lose all your lives at once, you wanna do it right."

TORBU watched as the boys belted and strapped me into a guardsman's fighting outfit. I had made him uneasy, maybe even started him thinking.

I felt better in the clean trappings of tough leather and steel. Torbu led the way and fifteen bodyguards followed, like a herd of Trolls. We stopped before a great double door. Two guards in dress purple sauntered over to see what it was all about. Torbu clued them in. They hesitated, looked us over . . .

"We're goin' in, rookie," said

Torbu. "Open up." They did.

I pushed past Torbu into a room whose splendor made Gope's state apartment look like a four-dollar motel. Bright Cintelight streamed through tall windows, showed me a wide bed and somebody in it. I went to it, grabbed the bedclothes, and hauled them to the floor. Owner Qohey sat up slowly—seven feet of muscle. He looked at me, glanced past me to the foremost of my escort . . .

He was out of bed like a tiger, coming straight for me. There was no time to fumble with the sword. I went to meet him, threw all my weight into a right haymaker and felt it connect. I plunged past, whirled.

Qohey was staggering . . . but still on his feet. I had hit him with everything I had, nearly broken my fist . . . and he was still standing. I couldn't let him rest. I was after him, slammed a hard punch to the kidneys, caught him across the jaw as he turned, drove a left and right into his stomach—

A girder fell from the top of the Golden Gate Bridge and shattered every bone in my body. There was a booming like heavy surf, and I was floating in it, dead. Then I was in Hell, being prodded by red-hot tridents . . . I blinked my eyes. The roaring was fading now. I saw Qohey, leaning against the foot of the

bed, breathing heavily. I had to get him.

I got my feet under me, stood up. My chest was caved in and my left arm belonged to somebody else. Okay; I still had my right. I made it over to Qohey, maneuvered into position. He didn't look at me; he seemed to be having trouble breathing; those gut punches had gotten to him. I picked a spot just behind the right ear, reared back, and threw a trip-hammer punch with my shoulder and legs behind it. I felt the jaw go. Qohey jumped the footboard and piled onto the floor like a hundred-car freight hitting an open switch. I sat down on the edge of the bed and sucked in air and tried to ignore the whirling lights that were closing in.

AFTER awhile I noticed Torbu standing in front of me with the cat under one arm. Both of them were grinning at me. "Any orders, Owner Dragon?"

I found my voice. "Wake him up and prop him in a chair. I want to talk to him."

Ex-Owner Qohey didn't much like the idea but after Torbu and a couple of the other strong-arm lads had explained the situation to him in sign language he decided to co-operate.

"Get off his head, Mull," Torbu said. "And untwist that

rope, Blon. Owner Dragon wants him in a conversational mood."

Qohey was looking at me now, eyes wild. He grunted something, but was having trouble talking around his broken jaw.

"The fellow in black," I said: "the one who claimed your place as Owner. You netted him and had your bully boys haul him off somewhere. I want to know where."

Qohey grunted again.

"Hit him, Torbu," I said. "It will help his enunciations." Torbu kicked the former Owner in the shin. Qohey jumped and glowered at him.

"Call off your dogs," he mumbled. "You'll not find the upstart you seek here."

"Why not?"

"I sent him away."

"Where?"

"To that place from which you and your turncoat crew will never fetch him back."

"Be more specific."

Qohey spat.

I took out the needle-pointed knife I was wearing as part of my get-up. I put the point against Qohey's throat and pushed gently until a trickle of crimson ran down the thick neck.

"Talk," I said quietly, "or I'll cut your throat myself."

Qohey had shrunk back as far as he could in the heavy chair.

"Seek him then, assassin," he sneered. "Seek him in the dun-

geons of the Owner of Owners."

"Keep talking," I prompted.

"The Great Owner commanded that the slave be brought to him . . . at the Palace of Sapphires by the Shallow Sea."

"Has this Owners' Owner got a name?"

"Lord Ommodurad," Qohey's voice grated out.

"When did he go?"

"Yesterday."

"You know this Sapphire Palace, Torbu?"

"Sure, but the place is tabu; it's crawlin' with demons and warlocks. The word is, there's a curse on the—"

"Then I'll go in alone," I said. I put the knife away. "But first I've got a call to make at the spaceport at Okk-Hamiloth."

"Sure, Owner Drgon. The port's easy. Some say it's kind of haunted too but that's just a gag; the Grey-men hang out there."

"We can take care of the Grey-men," I said. "Get fifty of your best men together and line up some air-cars. I want the outfit ready to move in half an hour."

"What about this chiseller?" asked Torbu.

"Seal him up until I get back. If I don't make it, I know he'll understand."

CHAPTER XVII

IT was not quite dawn when my task force settled down

A TRACE OF MEMORY

on the smooth landing pad beside the life boat that had brought me to Vallon. It stood as I had left it seven earth-months before: the port open, the access ladder extended, the interior lights lit. There weren't any spooks aboard but they had kept visitors away as effectively as if there had been. Even the Grey-men didn't mess with ghost-boats. Somebody had done a thorough job of indoctrination on Vallon.

Itzenca scampered up the ladder and had disappeared inside the boat by the time I took the first rung. The guards gawked from below as I stepped into the softly lit lounge. The black-and-gold banded cylinder that was Foster's memory lay in the bag where I had left it, and with it was the other, plain one. Somewhere in Okk-Hamiloth must be the machine that would give these meaning. Together, Foster and I would find it.

I found the .38 automatic lying where I had left it. I picked up the worn belt, strapped it around me. My Vallonian career to date suggested it would be a bright idea to bring it along. The Vallonians had never developed any personal armament to equal it. In a society of immortals knives were considered lethal enough for all ordinary purposes.

"Come on, cat," I said.



"There's nothing more here we need."

Back on the ramp, I beckoned my platoon leaders over.

"I'm going to the Sapphire Palace," I said. "Anybody that doesn't want to go can check out now. Pass the word."

Torbu stood silent for a long moment, staring straight ahead.

"I don't like it much, Owner," he said. "But I'll go. And so will the rest of 'em."

"There'll be no backing out, once we shove off," I said. "And by the way—" I jacked a round into the chamber of the pistol, raised it, and fired the shot into the air. They all jumped. "If you ever hear that sound, come a-running."

The men nodded, turned to their cars. I picked up the cat and piled into the lead vehicle next to Torbu.

"It's a half-hour run," he said. "We might run into a little Greyman action on the way. We can handle 'em."

We lifted, swung to the east, barrelled along at low altitude.

"What do we do when we get there, boss?" said Torbu.

"We play it by ear. Let's see how far we can get on pure gall before Ommodurad drops the hanky."

THE palace lay below us, rearing blue towers to the twilight sky like a royal residence in the

Munchkin country. Beyond it, sunset colors reflected from the silky surface of the Shallow Sea. The timeless stones and still waters looked much as they had when Foster set out to lose his identity on Earth, three thousand years before. But its magnificence was lost on these people. The hulking crew around me never paused to wonder about the marvels wrought by their immortal ancestors—themselves—; stolidly they lived their feudal lives in dismal contrast with the monuments all about them.

We were dropping toward the wide lawns now and still no opposition showed itself. Then the towering blue spires were looming over us, and we saw men forming up behind the blue-stained steel gates of the Great Pavillion.

"A reception committee," I said. "Hold tight, fellas. Don't start anything. The further in we get peaceably the less that leaves to do the hard way."

The cars settled down gently, well grouped, and Torbu and I climbed out. As quickly as the other boats disgorged their men, ranks were closed, and we moved off toward the gates. Itzenca, as mascot, brought up the rear. Still no excitement, no rush by the Palace guards. Had too many centuries of calm made them lackadaisical, or did Ommodurad use some other brand

of visitor-repellent we couldn't see from here?

We made it to the gate . . . and it opened.

"In we go," I said, "but be ready . . ."

The uniformed men inside the compound, obviously chosen for their beef content, kept their distance, looked at us queryingly. We pulled up on a broad blue-paved drive and waited for the next move.

IT was a long five minutes before a hard case in a beetle-backed carapace or armor and a puffy pink cape bustled down the palace steps and came up to us.

"Who comes in force to the Sapphire Palace?" he demanded, glancing past me at my teammates.

"I'm Owner Drgon, fellow," I barked. "These are my honor guard. What provincial welcome is this, from the Great Owner to a loyal liege-man?"

That punctured his pomposity a little. He apologized—in a half-hearted way, mumbled something about arrangements, and beckoned over a couple of sidemen. One of them came over and spoke to Torbu, who looked my way, hand on dagger hilt.

"What's this?" I said. "Where I go, my men go."

"There is the matter of caste," said my pink-caped greeter. "Packs of retainers are

not ushered *en masse* into the presence of Lord Ommodurad, Owner of Owners."

I thought that one over and failed to come up with a plausible loop-hole.

"Okay, Torbu," I said. "Keep the boys together and behave yourselves. I'll see you in an hour. Oh, and see that Itzenca gets made comfy."

The beetle man snapped a few orders, then waved me toward the palace with the slightest bow I ever saw. A six-man guard kept me company up the steps and into the Great Pavilion.

I guess I expected the usual velvet-draped audience chamber or barbarically splendid Hall, complete with pipers, fools, and ceremonial guards. What I got was an office, about sixteen by eighteen, blue-carpeted and tasteful . . . but bare-looking. I stopped in front of a block of blue-veined grey marble with a couple of quill pens in a crystal holder and, underneath, leg room for a behemoth, who was sitting behind the desk.

He got to his feet with all the ponderous mass of Nero Wolfe but a lot more agility and grace. "You wish?" he rumbled.

"I'm Owner Drgon, ah . . . Great Owner," I said. I'd planned to give my host the friendly-but-dumb routine. I was going to find the second part of the act easy. There was something about

Ommodurad that made me feel like a mouse who'd just changed his mind about the cheese. Qohey had been big, but this guy could crush skulls as most men pinch peanut hulls, and in his eyes was the kind of remote look that came of three millennia of not even having to mention the power he asserted.

"You ignore superstition," observed the Big Owner. He didn't waste many words, it seemed. Gope had said he was the silent type. It wasn't a bad lead; I decided to follow it.

"Don't believe in 'em," I said.

"To your business then," he continued. "Why?"

"Just been chosen Owner at Bar-Ponderone," I said. "Felt it was only fitting that I come and do obeisance before Your Grace."

"That expression is not used."

"Oh." This fellow had a disconcerting way of not getting sucked in. "Lord Ommodurad?"

HE nodded just perceptibly, then turned to the foremost of the herd who had brought me in. "Quarters for the guest and his retinue." His eyes had already withdrawn, like the head of a Galapagos turtle into its enormous shell, and were remote, in contemplation of eternal verities. I piped up again.

"Ah, pardon me." The piercing stare of Ommodurad's eyes was on me again. "There was a

friend of mine—swell guy, but impulsive. It seems he challenged the former Owner of Bar-Pond-rone . . .”

Ommodurad did no more than twitch an eyebrow but suddenly the air was electric. His stare didn't waver by a millimeter but the lazy slouch of the six guards had altered to sprung steel. They hadn't moved but I felt them now all around me and not a foot away. I had a sinking feeling that I'd gone too far.

“—so I thought maybe I'd crave Your Excellency's help, if possible, to locate my pal,” I finished weakly. For an interminable minute the Owner of Owners bored into me with his eyes. Then he raised a finger a quarter of an inch. The guards relaxed.

“Quarters for the guest and his retinue,” repeated Ommodurad. He withdrew then . . . without moving. I was dismissed.

I went quietly, attended by my hulking escort.

I tried hard not to let my expression show any excitement, but I was feeling plenty.

Ommodurad was close-mouthed for a reason. I was willing to bet that he had his memories of the Good Time intact.

Instead of the debased modern dialect that I'd heard everywhere since my arrival, Ommodurad spoke flawless Old Vallonian.

IT was 27 o'clock and the Palace of Sapphires was silent. I was alone in the ornate bed chamber the Great Owner had assigned me. It was a nice room but I wouldn't learn anything staying in it. Nobody had said I was confined to quarters. I'd do a little scouting and see what I could pick up, if anything. I slung on the holster and .38 and slid out of the darkened chamber into the scarcely lighter corridor beyond. I saw a guard at the far end; he ignored me. I headed in the opposite direction.

None of the rooms were locked. There was no arsenal at the Palace and no archives that lesser folk than the Great Owner could use with profit. Everything was easy of access. I guessed that Ommadurad rightly counted on indifference to keep snoopers away. Here and there guards eyed me as I passed along but they said nothing.

I saw again by Cintelight the office where Ommadurad had received me and near it an ostentatious hall with black onyx floor and ceiling, gold hangings, and ceremonial ring board. But the center of attraction was the familiar motif of the concentric circles of the Two Worlds, sketched in beaten gold across the broad wall of black marble behind the throne. Here the idea had been elaborated on. Outward from both the inner and outer

circles flamed waving lines of sunburst, and at dead center a boss, like a sword hilt in form, chased in black and gold, erupted a foot from the wall. It was the first time I'd seen the symbol since I'd arrived on Vallon. I found it strangely exciting—like a footprint in the sand.

I went on, and came into a purple-vaulted hall where I saw a squad of guards, the same six who'd kept me such close company earlier in the day. They were drawn up at parade rest, three on each side of a massive ivory door. Somebody lived in safety and splendor on the other side.

Six sets of hard eyes turned my way. It was too late to duck back out of sight. I trotted up to the first of the row of guards. "Say, fella," I stage-whispered, "where's the ah—you know."

"Every bed chamber is equipped," he said gruffly, raising his sword and fingering its tip lovingly.

"Yeah? I never noticed." I moved off, looking chastened.

ON the ground floor I found Torbu and his cohort quartered in a barrack-room off the main entry hall. They had gotten hold of a few pipes of melon wine and were staging a small party with the help of several upstairs maids.

"We're still in enemy territory," I reminded Torbu. "I want every man ready. So save some of that booze for tomorrow."

"No fear, boss," said Torbu. "All my bullies got a eye on the door and a hand on a knife-hilt."

"Have you seen or heard anything useful?"

"Naw. These local dullards fall dumb at the first query."

"Keep your ears cocked. I want at least two men awake and on the alert all night."

"You bet, noble Drgon."

I judged distances carefully as I went back up the two flights to my own room. Inside I dropped into a brocaded easy chair and tried to add up what I'd seen.

First: Ommodurad's apartment, as nearly as I could judge, was directly over my own, two floors up. That was a break—or maybe I was where I was for easier surveillance. I'd skip that angle, I decided. It tended to discourage me and I needed all the enthusiasm I could generate.

Second: I wasn't going to learn anything useful trotting around corridors. Ommodurad wasn't the kind to leave traces of skullduggery lying around where the guests would see them.

And third: I should have known better than to hit this fortress with two squads and a

.38 in the first place. Foster was here; Qohey had said so and the Great Owner's reaction to my mention of him confirmed it. What was it about Foster, anyway, that made him so interesting to these Top People? I'd have to ask him that when I found him. But to do that I'd have to leave the beaten track.

I went to the wide double window and looked up. A cloud swept from the great three-quarters face of Cinte, blue in the southern sky, and I could see an elaborately carved facade ranging up past a row of windows above my own to a railed balcony bathed in a pale light from the apartment within. If my calculations were correct that would be Ommodurad's digs. The front door was guarded like an octogenarian's harem but the back way looked like a breeze.

I pulled my head back in and thought about it. It was risky . . . but it had that element of the unexpected that just might let me get away with it. Tomorrow the Owner of Owners might have thought it through and switched me to another room . . . or to a cell in the basement. Then too, wall-scaling didn't occur to these Vallonians as readily as it did to a short-timer from Earth. They had too much to lose to risk it on a chancy climb.

Too much thinking is never a good idea when your pulse is telling you it's time for action. I rolled a heavy armoire fairly soundlessly over the deep-pile carpet and lodged it against the door. That might slow down a casual caller. I slipped the magazine out of the automatic, fitted nine greasy brass cartridges into it, slammed it home, dropped the pistol back in the holster. It had a comforting weight. I buttoned the strap over it and went back to the window.

THE clouds were back across Cinte's floodlight; that would help. I stepped out. The deep carving gave me easy handholds and I made it to the next window sill without even working up a light sweat. Compared with my last climb, back in Lima, this was a cinch.

I rested a minute, then clambered around the dark window—just in case there was an insomniac on the other side of the glass—and went on up. I reached the balcony, had a hairy moment as I groped outward for a hold on the smooth floor-tiling above . . . and then I was pulling up and over the ornamental iron work.

The balcony was narrow, about twenty feet long, giving on half a dozen tall glass doors. Three showed light behind heavy drapes, three were dark. I moved

close, tried to see something past the edge of the drapes. No go. I put an ear to the glass, thought maybe I heard a sound, like a distant volcano. That would be Ommodurad's brass rumble. The bear was in his cave.

I went along to the dark doors and on impulse tried a handle. It turned and the door swung in soundlessly. I felt my pulse pick up a double-time beat. I stood peering past the edge of the door into the ink-black interior. It didn't look inviting. In fact it looked as repellent as hell. Even a country boy like me could see that to step into the dragon's den without even a zippo to spot the footstools with would be the act of a nitwit.

I swallowed hard, got a firm grip on my pistol, and went in.

A soft fold of drapery brushed my face and I had the pistol out and my back to the wall with a speed that would have made Earp faint with envy. My adrenals gave a couple of wild jumps and my nervous system followed with a variety of sensations, none pleasant. I could hear Ommodurad's voice better now, muttering beyond the partition. If I could make out what he was saying . . .

I edged along the wall, found a heavy door, closed and locked. No help there. I felt my way further, found another door. Delicately I tried the handle.

A closet, half filled with racked garments. But I could hear more clearly now. Maybe it was a double closet with communicating doors to both the room I was in and the next one where the Great Owner was still rambling on. Apparently something had overcome his aversion to talking. There were pauses that must have been filled in by the replies of somebody else who didn't have the vocal timbre Ommodurad did.

I felt my way through the hanging clothing, felt over the closet walls. I was out of luck: there was no other door. I put an ear to the wall. I could catch an occasional word:

" . . . ring . . . Okk-Hamiloth . . . vaults . . . "

IT sounded like something I'd like to hear more about. How could I get closer? On impulse I reached up, touched a low ceiling . . . and felt a ridge like the trim around an access panel to a crawl space.

I crossed my fingers, stood on tiptoe to push at the panel. Nothing moved. I felt around in the dark, encountered a low shelf covered with shoes. I investigated; it was movable. I eased it aside a foot or two, piled the shoes on the floor, and stepped up.

The panel was two feet long on a side, with no discernible

hinges or catch. I pushed some more, then gritted my teeth and heaved. There was a startlingly loud Crack! and the panel lifted. I blinked away the dust that settled in my eyes, reached to feel around within the opening, touched nothing but rough floor boards.

I cocked my head, listening. Ommodurad had stopped talking and another voice said something. Then there was a heavy thump, the clump of feet, and a metallic sound. After a moment the Great Owner's voice came again . . . and the other voice answered.

I stretched, grabbed the edge of the opening, and pulled myself up. I leaned forward, got a leg up, and rolled silently onto the rough floor. Feeling my way, I crawled, felt a wall rising, followed it, turned a corner . . . The voices were louder, quite suddenly. I saw why: there was a ventilating register ahead, gridded light gleaming through it. I crept along to the opening, lay flat, peered through it and saw three men.

Ommodurad was standing with his back to me, a giant figure swathed to the eyes in purple robes. Beside him a lean red-head with a leg that had been broken and badly set stood round-shouldered, clutching a rod of office. The third man was Foster.

FOSTER stood, legs braced apart as though to withstand an earthquake, hands manacled before him. He looked steadily at the red-head, like a man marking a tree for cutting.

"I know nothing of these crimes," he said.

Ommodurad turned, swept out of sight. The red-head motioned. Foster turned away, moving stiffly, passed from my view. I heard a door open and close. I lay where I was and tried to sort out half a dozen conflicting impulses that clamored for attention. I finally decided it might do some good to gather more information. It had been bad luck that I had arrived at my peephole a few minutes too late to hear what the interview had been all about. But I might still make use of my strategic advantage.

I felt over the register, found fasteners at the corners. They lifted easily and the metal grating tilted back into my hands. I laid it aside, poked my head out. The room was empty, as far as I could see. It was time to take a few chances. I reversed my position, let my legs through the opening, and dropped softly to the floor. I reached back up and managed to prop the grating in position—just in case.

It was a fancy chamber, hung in purple and furnished for a king. I poked through the pi-

geon-holes of a secretary, opened a few cupboards, peered under the bed. It looked like I wasn't going to find any useful clues lying around loose.

I went to the glass doors to the balcony, unlocked one and left it ajar—in case I wanted to leave in a hurry. There was another door across the room. I went over and tried it: locked.

That gave me something definite to look for: a key. I rummaged some more in the secretary, then tried the drawer in a small table beside a broad couch and came up with a nice little steel key that looked like maybe . . .

I tried it. It was. Luck was still coming my way. I pushed open the door, saw a dark room beyond. I felt for a light switch, flicked it on, pushed the door shut behind me.

THE room looked like the popular idea of a necromancer's study. The windowless walls were lined with shelves packed close with books. The high black-draped ceiling hung like a hovering bat above the ramparted floor of bare, dark-polished wood. Narrow tables choked with books and instruments stood along a side of the chamber and at the far end I saw a deep-cushioned couch with a heavy dome-shaped apparatus like a beauty shop hair-dryer

mounted at one end. I recognized it: it was a memory reinforcing machine, the first I had seen on Vallon.

I crossed the room and examined it. The last one I had seen—on the far-voyager in the room near the library—had been a stark utility model. This was a deluxe job, with soft upholstery and bright metal fittings and more dials and idiot lights than a late model Detroit status symbol. This solved one of the problems that had been hovering around the edge of my mind. I had fetched Foster's memory back to him but without a machine to use it in, it was just a tantalizing souvenir. Now all I had to do was sneak him away from Ommodurad, make it back here . . .

All of a sudden I felt tired, vulnerable, helpless and all alone. What was Ommodurad's interest in Foster? Why did he hide away here, keeping the rest of Vallon away with rumors of magic and spells? What connection did he have with the disaster that had befallen the Two Worlds—now reduced to One, and a poor one at that.

And why was I, a plain Joe named Legion, mixed up in it right to the eyebrows, when I could be sitting safe at home in a clean federal pen?

The answer to the last one wasn't too hard to recite: I had

had a pal once, a smooth character named Foster, who had pulled me back from the ragged edge just when I was about to make a bigger mistake than usual. He had been a gentleman in the best sense of the word, and he had treated me like one. Together we had shared a strange adventure that had made me rich and had showed me that it was never too late to straighten your back and take on whatever the Fates handed out.

I had come running his way when trouble got too thick back home. And I'd found him in a worse spot than I was in. He had come back, after the most agonizing exile a man had ever suffered, to find his world fallen back into savagery, and his memory still eluding him. Now he was in chains, without friends and without hope . . . but still not broken, still standing on his own two feet . . .

But he was wrong on one point: he had one little hope. Not much: just a hard-luck guy with a penchant for bad decisions, but I was here and I was free. I had my pistol on my hip and a neat back way into the Owner's bedroom, and if I played it right and watched my timing and had maybe just a little luck, say about the amount it took to hit the Irish Sweepstakes, I might bring it off yet.

Right now it was time to return to my crawl-space. Ommodurad might come back and talk some more, tip me off to a vulnerable spot in the armor of his fortress. I went to the door, flicked off the light, turned the handle . . . and went rigid.

OMMODURAD was back. He pulled off the purple cloak, tossed it aside, strode to a wall bar. I clung to the crack of the door, not daring to move even to close it.

"But my lord," the voice of the red-head said, "I trow he remembers—"

"Not so," Ommodurad's voice rumbled. "On the morrow I strip his mind to the bare clean jelly . . ."

"Let me, dread lord. With my steel I'll have the truth o' him."

"Such a one as he your steel has never known!" the bass voice snarled.

"Great Owner, I crave but one hour . . . tomorrow, in the Ceremonial Chamber. I shall environ him with the emblems of the past—"

"Enough!" Ommodurad's fist slammed against the bar, made glasses jump. "On such starveling lackwits as you a mighty empire hangs. It is a crime before the Gods and on his head I lay it." The Owner tossed off a glass. "I grant thy boon. Now begone, babbler of folly."

The red-head ducked, grinning, disappeared.

The big man threw off his clothes then. He clambered up on the wide couch, touched a switch somewhere, and the room was dark. Within five minutes I heard the heavy breathing of deep sleep.

I had found out one thing anyway: tomorrow was Foster's last day. One way or another Ommodurad and the red-head between them would destroy him. That didn't leave much time. But since the project was already hopeless it didn't make much difference.

I had a choice of moves now: I could tip-toe across to the register and try to wiggle through it without waking up the brontosaurus on the bed . . . or I could try for the balcony door a foot from where he slept . . . or I could stay put and wait him out. The last idea had the virtue of requiring no immediately daring adventures. I could just curl up on the floor, or, better still, on the padded couch . . .

A WEIRD idea was taking shape in my mind. I felt in my pocket, pulled out the two small cylinders that represented two men's memories of hundreds of years of living. One belonged to Foster, the one with the black and golden bands, but the other was the property of a stranger

who had died three thousand years ago, out in space . . .

This cylinder, barely three inches long, held all the memories of a man who had been Foster's confidant when he was Qulqlan, a man who knew what had happened aboard the ship, what the purpose of the expedition had been, and what conditions they had left behind on Vallon.

I needed that knowledge. The cylinder could tell me plenty, including, possibly, the reason for Ommodurad's interest in Foster.

It was simple to use. I merely placed the cylinder in the receptacle in the side of the machine, took my place, lowered the helmet into position . . . and in an hour or so I would awaken with another man's memories stored in my brain, to use as I saw fit.

It would be a crime to waste the opportunity. The machine I had found here was probably the only one still in existence on Vallon. I had blundered my way into the one room in the palace that could help me in what I had to do; I had been lucky.

I went across to the soft cushioned chair, spotted the recess in its side, and thrust the plain cylinder into it.

I sat on the couch, lay back, reached up to pull the head-piece down into position, against my skull . . .

There was an instant of pain—like a pre-frontal lobotomy performed without anesthetic.

Then blackness.

I STOOD beside the royal couch where Qulqlan the Rthr lay and I saw that this was the hour for which I had waited long, for the Change was on him . . .

The time-scale stood at the third hour of the Death watch; all aboard slept save myself alone. I must move swiftly and at the Dawn watch show them the deed well done.

I shook the sleeping man, him who had once been the Rthr—king no more, by the law of the Change. He wakened slowly, looked about him, with the clear eyes of the newborn.

"Rise," I commanded. And the king obeyed.

"Follow me," I said. He made to question me, after the manner of those newly wakened from their Change. I bade him be silent. Like a lamb he came and I led him through shadowed ways to the cage of the Hunters. They rose, keen in their hunger, to my coming, as I had trained them.

I took the arm of Qulqlan and thrust it into the cage. The Hunters clustered, taking the mark of their prey. He watched, innocent eyes wide.

"That which you feel is pain,

mindless one," I spoke. "It is a thing of which you will learn much in the time before you." Then they had done, and I set the time catch.

In my chambers I cloaked the innocent in a plain purple robe and afterward led him to the cradle where the life boat lay . . .

And by virtue of the curse of the Gods which is upon me one was there before me. I waited not but moved as the hawk strikes and took him fair in the back with my dagger. I dragged his body into hiding behind the flared foot of a column. But no sooner was he hidden well away than others came from the shadows, summoned by some device I know not of. They asked of the Rthr wherefore he walked by night, robed in the colors of Ammaerln of Bros-Ilyond. And I knew black despair, that my grand design foundered thus in the shallows of their zeal.

Yet I spoke forth, with a great show of anger, that I, Ammaerln, vizier and companion to the Rthr, did but walk and speak in confidence with my liege lord.

But they persisted, Gholad foremost among them. And then one saw the hidden corse and in an instant they ringed me in.

THEN did I draw the long blade and hold it at the throat of Qulqlan. 'Press me not, or your king will surely die,' I said.

And they feared me and shrank back.

"Do you dream that I, Ammaerln, wisest of the wise, have come for the love of far-voyaging?" I raged. "Long have I plotted against this hour; to lure the king a-voyaging in this his princely yacht, his faithful vizier at his side, that the Change might come on him far from his court. Then would the ancient wrong be redressed.

"There are those men born to rule as inevitably as the dream-tree seeks the sun—and such a one am I! Long has this one, now mindless, denied to me my destiny. But behold: I (with a stroke, shall set things aright.

"Below us lies a green world, peopled by savages. Not one am I to take blood vengeance on a man newborn from the Change. Instead I shall set him free to take up his life there below. May the Fates lead him again to royal state if that be their will—"

B*ut there were naught but fools among them and they drew steel. I cried out to them that all, all should share!*

But they heeded me not but rushed upon me. Then did I turn to Qulqlan and drive the long blade at his throat, but Gholad threw himself before him and fell, impaled in the throat. Then they pressed me and I did strike out against three who hemmed

me close, and though they took many wounds they persisted in their madness, one leaping in to strike and another at my back, so that I whirled and slashed at shadows who danced away.

In the end I hunted them down in those corners whither they had dragged themselves and each did I put to the sword. And I turned at last to find the Rthr gone and some few with him, and madness took me that I had been gulled like a tinker by common men.

In the chamber of the memory couch would I find them. There they would seek to give back to the mindless one that memory of past glories which I had schemed so long to deny him. Almost I wept to see such cunning wasted. Terrible in my wrath I came upon them there. There were but two and, though they stood shoulder in the entry way, their poor dirks were no match for my long blade. I struck them dead and went to the couch, to lay my hand on the cylinder marked with the vile gold and black of Qulqlan, that I might destroy it and, with it, the Rthr, forever—

And I heard a sound and whirled about. A hideous figure staggered to me from the gloom and for an instant I saw the flash of steel in the bloody hand of the accursed Gholad whom I had left for dead. Then I knew cold agony between my ribs . . .

GHOLAD lay slumped against wall, his face greenish above the blood-soaked tunic. When he spoke air whistled through his slashed throat.

"Have done, traitor who once was honored of the king," he whispered "Have you no pity for him who once ruled in justice and splendor at High Okk-Hamiloth?"

"Had you not robbed me of my destiny, murderous dog," I croaked, "that splendor would have been mine."

"You came upon him helpless," gasped Gholad. "Make some amends now for your shame. Let the Rthr have his mind, which is more precious than his life."

"I but rest to gather strength. Soon will I rise and turn him from the couch. Then will I die content."

"Once you were his friend," Gholad whispered. "By his side you fought, when both of you were young. Remember that . . . and have pity. To leave him here, in this ship of death, mindless and alone . . ."

"I have loosed the Hunters!" I shrieked in triumph. "With them will the Rthr share this tomb until the end of time!"

Then I searched within me and found a last terrible strength and I rose up . . . and even as my hand reached out to pluck away the mind trace of the king I felt the bloody fingers of Gholad on my

ankle, and then my strength was gone. And I was falling headlong into that dark well of death from which there is no returning . . .

* * *

I woke up and lay for a long time in the dark without moving, trying to remember the fragments of a strange dream of violence and death. I could still taste the lingering dregs of some bitter emotion. For a moment I couldn't remember what it was I had to do; then with a start I recalled where I was. I had lain down on the couch and pulled the head-piece into place—

It hadn't worked.

I thought hard, tried to tap a new reservoir of memories, drew a blank. Maybe my Earth-mind was too alien for the Vallonian memory trace to affect. It was another good idea that hadn't worked out. But at least I had had a good rest. Now it was time to get moving. First: to see if Ommodurad was still asleep. I started to sit up—

Nothing happened.

I had a moment of vertigo, as my inner ear tried to accommodate to having stayed in the same place after automatically adjusting to my intention of rising. I lay perfectly still and tried to think it through.

I had tried to move . . . and hadn't so much as twitched a muscle. I was paralyzed . . . or tied up . . . or maybe, if I was

lucky, imagining things. I could try it again and next time—

I was afraid to try. Suppose I tried and nothing happened—again? This was ridiculous. All I had to do was sit up. I—

Nothing. I lay in the dark and tried to will an arm to move, my head to turn. It was as though I had no arm, no head—just a mind, alone in the dark. I strained to sense the ropes that held me down; still nothing. No ropes, no arms, no body. There was no pressure against me from the couch, no vagrant itch or cramp, no physical sensation. I was a disembodied brain, lying nestled in a great bed of pitch-black cotton wool.

Then, abruptly, I was aware of myself—not the gross mechanism of clumsy bone and muscle, but the neuro-electric field generated within the massive structure of a brain alive with flashing currents and a lightning interplay of molecular forces. A sense of orientation grew. I occupied a block of cells . . . here in the left hemisphere. The mass of neural tissue loomed over me, gigantic. And “I” . . . “I” was reduced to the elemental ego, who possessed as a material appurtenance ‘my’ arms and legs, ‘my’ body, ‘my’ brain . . . Relieved of outside stimuli I was able now to conceptualize myself as I actually was: an insubstantial state existing in an immaterial continuum, created

by the action of neural currents within the cerebrum, as a magnetic field is created in space by the flow of electricity.

And I knew what had happened. I had opened my mind to invasion by alien memories. The other mind had seized upon the sensory centers, driven me to this dark corner. I was a fugitive within my own skull.

For a timeless time I lay stunned, immured now as the massive stones of Bar-Ponderone had never confined me. My basic self-awareness still survived, but was shunted aside, cut off from any contact with the body itself.

With shadowy fingers of imagination I clawed at the walls surrounding me, fought for a glimpse of light, for a way out.

And found none.

Then, at last, I began again to think.

I must analyze my awareness of my surroundings, seek out channels through which impulses from sensory nerves flowed, and tap them.

I tried cautiously; an extension of my self-concept reached out with ultimate delicacy. There were the ranked infinities of cells, there the rushing torrents of gross fluid, there the taut cables of the interconnecting web, and there—

Barrier! Blank and impregnable the wall reared up. My

questing tendril of self-stuff raced over the surface like an ant over a melon, and found no tiniest fissure.

I withdrew. To dissipate my forces was senseless. I must select a point of attack, hurl against it all the power of my surviving identity.

The last of the phantom emotions that had clung—for how long?—to the incorporeal mind field had faded now, leaving me with no more than an intellectual determination to reassert myself. Dimly I recognized this sign of my waning sense of identity but there was no surge of instinctive fear. Instead I coolly assessed my resources—and almost at once stumbled into an unused channel, here within my own self-field. For a moment I recoiled from the outer configuration of the stored patterns . . . and then I remembered.

I had been in the water, struggling, while the Red soldier waited, rifle aimed. And then: a flood of data, flowing with cold, impersonal precision. And I had deftly marshalled the forces of my body to survive:

And once more: as I hung by numbed fingers under the cornice of the Yordano Tower, the cold voice had spoken.

And I had forgotten. The miracle had been pushed back, rejected by the conscious mind. But now I knew: this was the knowl-

edge that I had received from the background briefing device that I had used in my island strongroom before I fled. This was the survival data known to all Old Vallonians of the days of the Two Worlds. It had lain here, unused; the secrets of superhuman strength and endurance . . . buried by the imbecile censor-self's aversion to the alien.

But the ego alone remained now, stripped of the burden of neurosis, freed from subconscious pressures. The levels of the mind were laid bare, and I saw close at hand the regions where dreams were born, the barren sources of instinctive fear-patterns, the linkages to the blinding emotions; and all lay now under my overt control.

Without further hesitation I tapped the stored Vallonian knowledge, incompassed it, made it mine. There again I approached the barrier, spread out across it, probed in vain—

“ . . . vile primitive . . . ”

The thought thundered out with crushing force. I recoiled, then renewed my attack, alert now. I knew what to do.

I sought and found a line of synaptic weakness, burrowed at it—

“ . . . intolerable . . . vestigial . . . erasure . . . ”

I struck instantly, slipped past the impervious shield, laid firm

hold on the optic receptor bank. The alien mind threw itself against me, but too late. I held secure and the assault faded, withdrew. Cautiously I extended my interpretive receptivity. There was a pattern of pulses, oscillations in the λ/μ range. I tuned, focussed—

Abruptly I was seeing. For a moment my fragile equilibrium tottered, as I strove to integrate the flow of external stimuli into my bodiless self-concept. Then a balance was struck: I held my ground and stared through the one eye I had recaptured from the usurper.

And I reeled again!

Bright daylight blazed in the chamber of Ommodurad. The scene shifted as the body moved about, crossing the room, turning. . . . I had assumed that the body still lay in the dark but instead, it walked, without my knowledge, propelled by a stranger.

The field of vision flashed across the couch. Ommodurad was gone.

I sensed that the entire left lobe, disoriented by the loss of the eye, had slipped now to secondary awareness, its defenses weakened. I retreated momentarily from my optic outpost, laid a temporary traumatic block across the access nerves to keep the intruder from reasserting possession, and concentrated my force in an attack on the auricular

channels. It was an easy rout. I seized on the nerve trunk, then instantly reoccupied the eye, coordinated its impressions with those coming in along the aural nerves . . . and heard my voice mouth a curse.

The body was standing beside a bare wall with a hand laid upon it. In the wall a recess partly obscured by a sliding panel stood empty.

The body turned, strode to a doorway, emerged into a gloomy violet-shadowed corridor. The glance flicked from the face of one guard to another. They stared in open-mouthed surprise, brought weapons up.

"You dare to bar the path to the Lord Ammaerln?" My voice slashed at the men. "Stand aside, as you value your lives."

And the body pushed past them, strode off along the corridor. It passed through a great archway, descended a flight of marble stairs, came along a hall I had seen on my tour of the Palace of Sapphires and into the Onyx Chamber with the great golden sunburst that covered the high black wall.

In the Great Owner's chair at the ringboard Ommodurad sat scowling at the lame courtier whose red hair was hidden now under a black cowl. Between them Foster stood, the heavy manacles dragging at his wrists.

Ommodurad turned; his face paled, then flush dark rose, teeth bared.

The gaze of my eye fixed on Foster. Foster stared back, a look of incredulity growing on his face.

"My Lord Rthr," my voice said. The eye swept down and fixed on the manacles. The body drew back a step, as if in horror.

"You overreach yourself, Ommodurad!" my voice cried harshly.

Ommodurad stepped toward me, his immense arm raised.

"Lay not a hand on me, dog of a usurper!" my voice roared out. "By the Gods, would you take me for common clay!"

And, unbelievably, Ommodurad paused, stared in my face.

"I know you as the upstart Drgon, petty Owner," he rumbled. "But I trow I see another there behind your pale eyes."

"Foul was the crime that brought me to this pass," my voice said. "But . . . know that your master, Ammaerln, stands before you, in the body of a primitive!"

"Ammaerln . . .!" Ommodurad jerked as though he had been struck.

My body turned, dismissing him. The eye rested on Foster.

"My liege," my voice said unctuously. "I swear the dog dies for this treason—"

"It is a mindless one, intru-

der," Ommodurad broke in. "Seek no favor with the Rthr, for he that was Rthr is no more. You deal with me now."

My body whirled on Ommodurad. "Give a thought to your tone, lest your ambitions prove your death!"

Ommodurad put a hand to his dagger. "Ammaerln of Bros-Ilyond you may be, or a changeling from dark regions I know not of. But know that this day I hold all power in Vallon."

"And what of this one who was once Qulqlan? What consort do you hold with him you say is mindless?" I saw my hand sweep out in a contemptuous gesture at Foster.

"An end to patience!" the Great Owner roared. He started toward my body.

"Does the fool, Ommodurad, forget the power of the great Ammaerln?" my voice said softly. And the towering figure hesitated once more, searching my face. "The Rthr's hour is past . . . and so is yours, bungler and fool. Your self-delusion is ended." My voice rose in a bellow: "Know that I . . . Ammaerln, the great . . . have returned to rule at High Okk-Hamiloth . . ."

He threw back his head, and laughed a choked throaty laugh that was half sob.

"Know, demon, or madman, or ancient prince of evil; for thirty

centuries have I brooded alone, sealed from an empire by a single key!"

I felt the shock rack through and through the invader mind. This was the opportunity I had hoped for. Quick as thought I moved, slashed at the wavering shield, and was past it—

Upon the mind-picture of Foster's face was now superimposed another: that of Qulqlan, Rthr of all Vallon, ruler of the Two Worlds!

And other pictures, snatched from the intruder mind, were present now in the Earth-consciousness of me, Legion:

the vaults, deep in the rock under the fabled city of Okk-Hamilo, where the mind-trace of every citizen was stored, sealed by the Rthr and keyed to his mind alone;

Ammaerln, urging the king to embark on a far-voyage, stressing the burden of government, tempting him to bring with him the royal mind-trace;

Qulqlan's acquiescence and Ammaerln's secret joy at the advancement of his scheme;

the coming of the Change for the Rthr, aboard ship, far out in space and the vizier's bold stroke;

and then the fools who found him at the lifeboat . . . and the loss of all, all . . .

There my own lived memories took up the tale: the awakening

of Foster, unsuspecting, and his recording of the mind of the dying Ammaerln; the flight from the Hunters; the memory trace of the king, that lay for three millennia among neolithic bones until I, a primitive, plucked it from its place; and the pocket of a coarse fibre garment where the cylinder lay now, on a hip of the body I inhabited and as inaccessible to me as if it had been a million miles away.

But there was a second memory trace—Ammaerln. I had crossed a galaxy to come to Foster, and with me, locked in an unmarked pewter cylinder, I had brought Foster's ancient nemesis.

I had given it life, and a body.

Foster, once Rthr, had survived against all logic and had come back from the dead: the last hope of a golden age . . .

To meet his fate at my hands.

Three thousand years," I heard my voice saying. "Three thousand years have the men of Vallon lived mindless, with the power that was Vallon locked away in a vault without a key." "And now, you think to force this mind—that is no mind—to unseal the vault?"

"I know it for a hopeless task," Ommodurad said. "At first I thought—since he speaks the tongue of old Vallon—that he dissembled. But he knows nothing. This is but the dry husk of the

Rthr . . . and I sicken of the sight. I would fain kill him now and let the long farce end."

"Not so!" my voice cut in. "Once I decreed exile to the mindless one. So be it!"

The face of Ommodurad twisted in its rage. "Your witless chatterings! I tire of them."

"Wait!" my voice snarled. "Would you put aside the key?"

There was a silence as Ommodurad stared at my face. I saw my hand rise into view. Gripped in it was Foster's memory trace.

"The Two Worlds lie in my hand," my voice spoke. "Observe well the black and golden bands of the royal memory trace. Who holds this key is all-powerful. As for the mindless body yonder, let it be destroyed."

Ommodurad locked eyes with mine. Then, "Let the deed be done," he said.

The red-head drew a long stiletto from under his cloak, smiling. I could wait no longer . . .

Along the link I had kept through the intruder's barrier I poured the last of the stored energy of my mind. I felt the enemy recoil, then strike back with crushing force. But I was past the shield.

As the invader reached out to encircle me I shattered my unified forward impulse into myriad nervous streamlets that flowed on, under, over, and around the opposing force; I spread myself

through and through the inner mass, drawing new power from the trunk sources.

Now! I struck for the right optic center, clamped down with a death grip.

The enemy mind went mad as the darkness closed in. I heard my voice scream and I saw in vivid pantomime the vision that threatened the invader: the red-head darting, the stiletto flashing—

And then the invading mind broke, swirled into chaos, and was gone . . .

I reeled, shocked and alone inside my skull. The brain loomed, dark and untenanted now. I began to move, crept along the major nerve paths, reoccupied the cortex—

Agony! I twisted, felt again with a massive return of sensation my arms, my legs, opened both eyes to see blurred figures moving. And in my chest a hideous pain . . .

I was sprawled on the floor, I lay gasping. Sudden understanding came: the red-head had struck . . . and the other mind, in full rapport with the pain centers, had broken under the shock, left the stricken brain to me alone.

As through a red veil I saw the giant figure of Ommodurad loom, stoop over me, rise with the royal cylinder in his hand. And beyond,

Foster strained backward, the chain between his wrists garrotting the red-head. Ommodurad turned, took a step, flicked the man from Foster's grasp and hurled him aside. He drew his dagger. Quick as a hunting cat Foster leaped, struck with the manacles . . . and the knife clattered across the floor. Ommodurad backed away with a curse, while the red-head seized the stiletto he had let fall and moved in. Foster turned to meet him, staggering, and raised heavy arms.

I fought to move, got my hand as far as my side, fumbled with the leather strap. The alien mind had stolen from my brain the knowledge of the cylinder but I had kept from it the fact of the pistol. I had my hand on its butt now. Painfully I drew it, dragged my arm up, struggled to raise the weapon, centered it on the back of the mop of red hair, free now of the cowl . . . and fired.

Ommodurad had found his dagger. He turned back from the corner where Foster had sent it spinning. Foster retreated until his back was at the wall: My vision grew dimmer. The great gold circles of the Two Worlds seemed to revolve, while waves of darkness rolled over me.

But there was a thought: something I had found among the patterns in the intruder's mind. At the center of the sunburst rose a

boss, in black and gold, erupting a foot from the wall, like a sword-hilt . . .

The thought came from far away. The sword of the Rthr, used once, in the dawn of a world, by a warrior king but laid away now, locked in its sheath of stone, keyed to the mind-pattern of the Rthr, that none other might ever draw it to some ignoble end.

A sword, keyed to the basic mind-pattern of the king . . .

I drew a last breath, blinked back the darkness. Ommodurad stepped past me, knife in hand, toward the unarmed man. "Foster," I croaked. "The sword . . ."

Foster's head came up. I had spoken in English; the syllables rang strangely in that outworld setting. Ommodurad ignored the unknown words.

"Draw . . . the sword . . . from the stone! . . . You're . . . Qulqlan . . . Rthr . . . of Vallon."

I saw him reach out, grasp the ornate hilt. Ommodurad, with a cry, leaped toward him—

The sword slid out smoothly, four feet of glittering steel. Ommodurad stopped, stared at the manacled hands gripping the hilt of the fabled blade. Slowly he sank to his knees, bent his neck.

"I yield, Qulqlan," he said. "I crave the mercy of the Rthr."

Behind me I heard thundering feet. Dimly I was aware of Torbu

raising my head, of Foster leaning over me. They were saying something but I couldn't hear. My feet were cold, and the coldness crept higher. The winds that swept through eternity blew away the last shred of ego and I was one with darkness . . .

Epilogue

I awoke to a light like that of a morning when the world was young. Gossamer curtains fluttered at tall windows, through which I saw a squadron of trim white clouds riding in a high blue sky.

I turned my head, and Foster stood beside me, dressed in a short white tunic.

"That's a crazy set of threads, Foster," I said, "but on your build it looks good. But you've aged; you look twenty-five if you look a day."

Foster smiled. "Welcome to Vallon, my friend," he said in English.

"Vallon," I said. "Then it wasn't all a dream?"

"Regard it as a dream, Legion. Your life begins today." Someone came forward from behind Foster.

"Gope," I said. Then I hesitated. "You are Gope, aren't you?" I said in Vallonian.

He laughed. "I was known by that name once," he said, "but my true name is Gwanne."

My eyes fell on my legs. I saw

that I was wearing a tunic like Foster's except that mine was pale blue.

"Who put the dress on me?" I asked. "And where's my pants?"

"This garment suits you better," said Gope. "Come. Look in the glass."

I got to my feet, stepped to a long mirror, glanced at the reflection. "It's not the real me, boys," I started. Then I stared, open-mouthed. A Hercules, black-haired and clean-limbed, stared back. I shut my mouth . . . and his mouth shut. I moved an arm and he did likewise. I whirled on Foster.

"What . . . how . . . who . . .?"

"The mortal body that was Legion died of its wounds," he said, "but the mind that was the man was recorded. We have waited many years to give that mind life again."

I turned back to the mirror, gaped. The young giant gaped back. "I remember," I said. "I remember . . . a knife in my guts . . . and a red-headed man . . . and the Great Owner, and . . ."

"For his crimes," told Gope, "he went to a place of exile until the Change should come on him. Long have we waited."

I looked again and now I saw two faces in the mirror and both of them were young. One was low down, just above my ankles, and it belonged to a cat I

had known as Itzenca. The other, higher up, was that of a man I had known as Ommodurad. But this was a clear-eyed Ommodurad, just under twenty-one.

"Onto the blank slate we traced your mind," said Gope.

"He owed you a life, Legion," Foster said. "His own was forfeit."

"I guess I ought to kick and scream and demand my original ugly puss back," I said slowly, studying my reflection, "but the fact is, I like looking like Mr. Universe."

"Your earthly body was infected with the germs of old age," said Foster. "Now you can look forward to a great span of life."

"But come," said Gope. "All Vallon waits to honor you." He

led the way to the tall window.

"Your place is by my side at the great ringboard," said Foster. "And afterwards: all of the Two Worlds lie before you."

I looked past the open window and saw a carpet of velvet green that curved over foothills to the rim of a forest. Down the long sward I saw a procession of bright knights and ladies come riding on animals, some black, some golden palamino, that looked for all the world like unicorns.

My eyes travelled upward to where the light of a great white sun flashed on blue towers. And somewhere in the distance trumpets sounded.

"It looks like a pretty fair offer," I said.

THE END

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Whistler

By DAVID ROME

Illustrated by SUMMERS

**Putting a Spacer in the engine room with Hank
was like human sacrifice. But a Spacer
has patience—and a certain skill.**

I KNEW we'd get trouble, with Hank and a Spacer together in the *Taros*. That Hank was the most unlikeable Chief I ever shipped with, and the whole crew knew it. But Cap Walters was Hank's contemporary, and he didn't give a cuss for aliens. So he just let it ride, and I worked out my watches in the sweatshop, and tried to keep the powder keg from blowing.

You know the way the Spacers are—the love they have for their whispering native music. They spend their lives in fashioning strange instruments—from metal scraps, from dried out skins and bones of ship rats, snared below. We used to say, during the War, that they won their fights with music, not with guns. Through all the long night watches, they'd stroke at one instrument or another. Slow, lilt-

ing tunes that tugged at something deep inside a man.

But it was here Hank found his opening. And sharp the needle was. And bitter as an acid.

You got your brains between your legs, Spacer?

Oh, jee-sus christ, you got no legs!

I'D heard it in the War—the tune the Spacers loved and played most often. Hank must have picked it up somewhere along the Rim, and now he put the obscene words to it. The engine room would ring with sound, while the alien went about his work. But he never made a move, or said a word to Hank.

I used to try to let him see that most of us were different. Sometimes, in the mess, I'd pass him a drink tube, and grin while

I was doing it. But Hank would pipe up from the end of the table, with his tune.

You know the way it goes.

I sometimes think back now to the time when I was still a kid. Remember how we'd get behind a Spacer on the walkway, chanting those words at him without even knowing what they meant? That was adult talk, so it was our talk, too.

And when he'd turn around, we'd swoop in low and lift that little skirt they used to wear, and see the single, snaillike foot.

Remember?

But after the War, when the Spacers had somehow melted the last of the Invaders out of the sky for us, we didn't do that anymore. Because we were the pilots who fought alongside the Spacers in the Great Deeps, and watched their silent heroism deliver Earth from the black needleships.

While men like Hank Baffour, too old to fight, rode tramp ships through the safety of hyperspace, and hung right on to their prejudices.

Hung right on, even now, as our ship plunged through the grey continuum toward Rim-away. . . .

I said one night: "You never were in the War, were you, Hank?"

Hank was wiping his hands on the sides of his coveralls. Not a

tall man, but wide through the shoulders. Even as I spoke, he began to whistle between his teeth, soft and tuneful—and carrying.

The Spacer was in his cot, taking his watch below, but I knew he'd hear all right. I stepped forward and spoke again: "You're starting to needle me, Hank."

Hank was still a handsome man for his age. But handsome in a way I didn't like. His features were too strong, his grey hair too carefully crinkled. He just kept whistling and looking at me, but he never answered.

WHEN I turned away, the centres of my palms were moist. I picked up a jackwrench and knew I was trembling. I chewed at my lip and thought: *The hell with it.* But I was hating myself for considering my career, and Jimmy, back home, and the pension I'd lose if I backhanded Hank.

I never heard him move up on me. I was bending over a pressure feed, wrench in hand, when he spoke very softly, right behind me:

"What were you in the War, hero?"

I didn't turn. I knew if I turned we would be at each other's throat. I said quietly: "Not a hero, Hank. Just a pilot, like a lot of other guys."

I kept on working, and all the time I could feel Hank bunched up right at my back. And then, so close I could feel the cold touch of air on my face, he started whistling. Soft and low, just for me. Begging me to turn. Wound up and ready for trouble.

I said steadily: "A real fine whistler, aren't you, Hank?" and I actually set myself for the blow. But it didn't come, and the whistling stopped. And when I turned, I saw why.

Hank had swung full circle, his head snapping round. His neck was scarlet, and throbbing, and I could see the little hairs at his nape bristling with rage.

He was looking across the engine room, straight into the eyes of the Spacer.

The ship seemed to draw in breath. I clearly heard my heart hammering as Hank took one pace—two paces—forward.

Even as he moved, his hand scooped down and came up with a heavy pipe fitting. He held it close to his body, level with his waist, and now he started whistling again, soft and vicious.

*You got your brains between your legs, Spacer?
Oh, jee-sus christ, you got no legs!*

And the Spacer just stood there, motionless, a part-finished musical instrument in his hands.

I don't remember moving. I was standing with the jack-wrench in my fist, thinking of Jimmy, my career. . . .

And then, quite suddenly, I was up behind Hank, and he was going down with blood coming out of his head. And there was blood on the wrench. . . .

CAPTAIN Walters listened to both sides of the story; but I knew I didn't have a chance. Hank spoke too long and too well, and the Captain nodded too often at what he was saying.

The Spacer spoke up for me, of course; but the Captain was one of the old school from the start, and behind Hank all the way.

I got my marching orders right after we blew out of hyperspace over Rimaway. I could ship back to Earth, or I could debark here, with full pay, and go my own way.

But I took one look at Hank's face, and I knew he would kill me if I ever sailed aboard that ship again. So I packed my bag and collected my pay, and left the *Taros* for good.

The Spacer left just after me. . . . But I didn't know that.

* * *

The year that followed is hazy in my memory, even now. I drank pretty solid for a month, and then I was taking work

here, and work there; just to keep myself alive.

The big ships that whispered down from the stars could never offer me a berth. I used to go into Mainport regularly, but there were star tramps like me on every world in the Galaxy, all looking for the way home, and I never got work.

And around that time, the colonies became bad with fever, and I was caught up in it. I was delirious some of the time, I know, but I stayed on my feet for a week, because I knew if I didn't get out of Rimaway, I was going to die.

I forced myself down to Mainport every day now. I tried for work aboard a dozen ships, but never found it. Only once. And then I got as far as the Medic. He looked at me without even getting up from behind his desk, and just shook his head.

I remember how hot it was that morning, as I stumbled out of his office. My head was making bright circles where the walkway should have been, and I had to stop and lean my back hard up against the terminal wall.

And then, directly overhead, far up, with a sound like thunder, a big ship materialized out of hyperspace. I watched it falling down, and saw its retros stab fire into the blueness. And then it was close overhead, filling the

sky, and I saw that it was my old ship, *Taros*.

And that was all I knew.

The walkway hit my face just as the time the big ship touched. I felt pain, and sharp surprise, and then nothing.

Nothing but more pain, shot with fire for a long time. And then the slow passing of what might have been days, or weeks, or years. . . .

UNTIL, one morning, I woke. Really woke, for the first time.

And the Spacer was bending over me.

Delirium?

I wasn't sure.

I reached up a hand, touched his face—and it felt like a face. Then the Spacer smiled at me the only way he could, by hooking his fingers into each side of his mouth and pulling it wide.

I smiled back, and the Spacer began to nod his head. I was looking around now. I was in a hospital in Mainport. Outside, I could hear the muted drum-roll of a ship going into hyperspace.

I said: "How did you find me?"

The Spacer stirred, and smiled you where ships come in. It was again. "Each day I looked for you where ships come in. It was not easy with so many people, but I found you."

And I relaxed then, thanking

God; and like the voice of music in my ears, I heard the Spacer say:

"Now, I can help you to go home...."

There's not much more to tell. This should have been the story's end. Perhaps it is.

But I'm not sure.

For the ship that took me back to Earth was *Taros*, and I sailed with her engine room crew.

Because Hank Baffour, her Chief, had deserted in Mainport that last trip out. Just walked off the ship. And never seen again.

The Spacer got his berth back, too; and all the way home, on his off-duty watches, he played a newly fashioned instrument I'd never seen before. Its shape was familiar though, somehow; and its tune came out softly, like a man whistling between his teeth through the dark reaches of the night.

You got your brains between your legs, Spacer?

Oh, jee-sus christ, you got no legs!

And you were a real fine whistler, Hank.

THE END

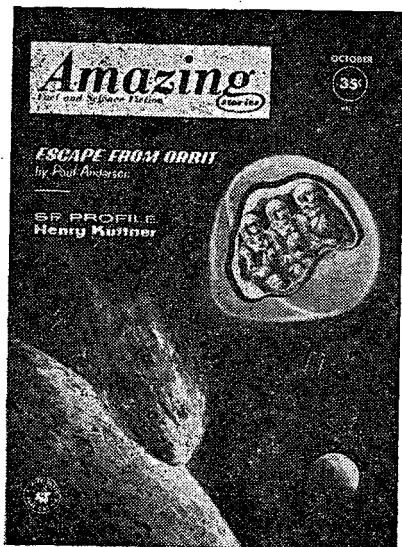
COMING NEXT MONTH

Heading the lineup for the October issue of **AMAZING** will be **Poul Anderson's** *Escape from Orbit*, accompanied by a striking cover illustration by an artist new to our pages.

Sam Moskowitz returns with the promised *SF Profile* of **Henry Kuttner**, a companion to the C. L. Moore Profile which appeared in August.

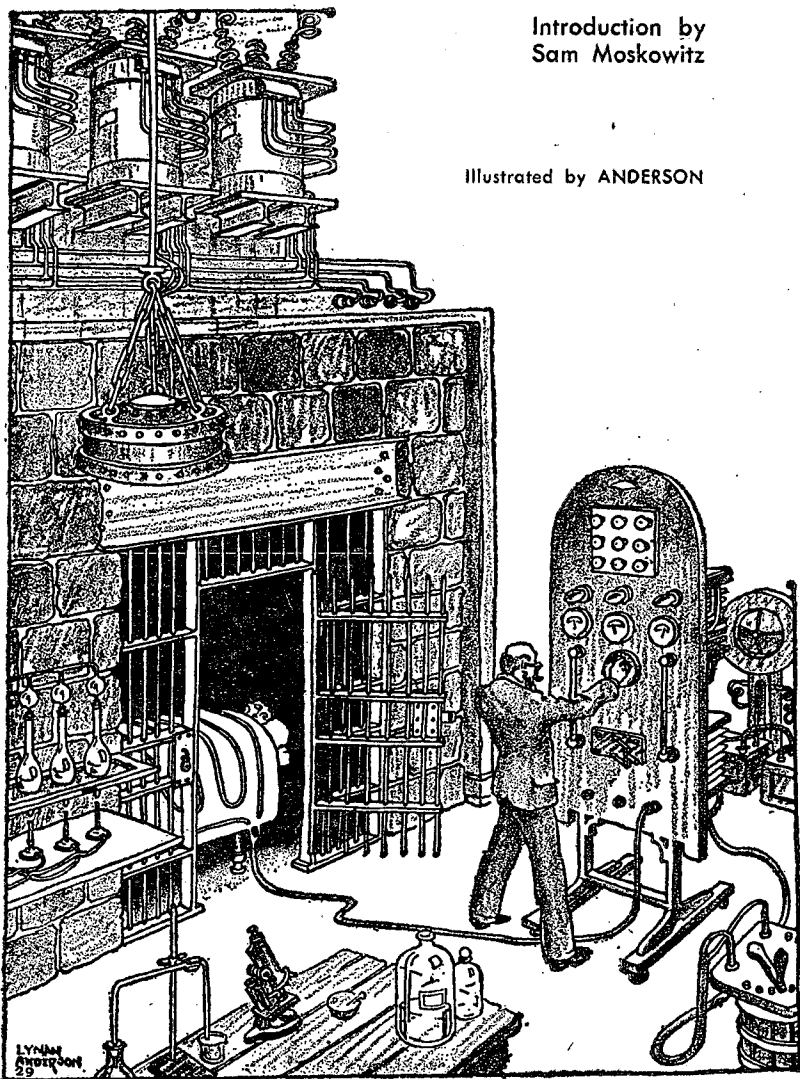
There will be short stories, our regular features, and a Classic Reprint—in short, more than enough reasons for you to reserve your copy now.

October **AMAZING** will be on sale at your newstand Sept. 11.



Introduction by
Sam Moskowitz

Illustrated by ANDERSON



The Ice Man

By WILLIAM WITHERS DOUGLAS

HUMOR is rare in science fiction and good natured humor even rarer. Usually what passes for humor is the merciless bludgeon of satire, delivered with the finesse of a battering ram. As a result, *The Ice Man* by William Withers Douglas, which appeared in the Feb., 1930 issue of *AMAZING STORIES* deserves, in its fullest sense, the appellation of "delightful."

Arthur K. Barnes and Henry Kuttner, writing individually and collectively under the house name of Kelvin Kent, presented the science fiction world with a series of humorous episodes concerning Pete Manx's travel trips back to the periods of Rome, Egypt and elsewhere from 1939 through to 1944 in *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*. The first of the series, *Roman Holiday*, finds men of today's world trying to make out in ancient Rome.

William Withers Douglas, had tried the process in reverse nine years earlier with considerably greater artistic and entertainment success. The Romans were an advanced people. It was far

from impossible that some of their chemists might have experimented with suspended animation.

The story is really a message from Marcus Publius to Caesar giving his adventures in the United States of 1928 and his reactions to what he sees and they are in character and hilarious. Typical of the penetrating humor are his remarks: "I was not to be fooled simply because the United States had their own trick calendar, a calendar based on the time they discovered there was a God.

"I wondered what they would do when they discovered that there are many Gods."

Since HARPER'S issued *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* in 1889, writers have been sending men of their present into the past with a high degree of literary success. Operations in reverse have not been as common or as successful. George F. Worts presented this theme under the title of *The Return of George Washington*, serialized in *ARGOSY* in 1927. Some of the edge

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was taken off his presentation, however, when the entire affair developed to be a hoax.

More recently, Edgar Rice Burroughs injected a blunt note of social criticism into his short story *The Resurrection of Jimber Jaw* published in the Feb. 20, 1937 issue of *ARGOSY*, wherein a prehistoric man, frozen in a block of ice, is thawed to cope with and give his reactions to modern civilization. This device is an old one with Burroughs, he used it in *The Eternal Lover* as far back as 1914 to bring into the modern world a man capable of

emulating Tarzan in the jungles of Africa. In the last-mentioned case, the main purpose was fetching through time for a handy superman rather than as an excuse for social criticism.

We find, then, that the device is not overly common in any event and that successful works in which a man from a very specific period with a known cultural background is brought into the present are infrequent. Rarer still are good stories of that nature, in that category *The Ice Man* most certainly belongs.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Under no consideration will the author reveal the identity of the person Marcus Publius mentioned in this story.

Our hero is now isolated in comfortable surroundings and is perfectly satisfied with his moderate luxuries, while enjoying complete freedom and peace of mind in his seclusion. Many readers will not sanction the author's action in effecting Marcus' escape from the B—— Insane Asylum. It is hoped that the reader will appreciate the author's position after reading the following manuscript. This manuscript or report was, of course, written in Latin and is given unaltered, other than the author's translation, as received from Marcus' hand. May the

reader judge for himself as to the sanity of our hero.

W. W. D.

This following inscription in English was first to meet the author's eyes when the herein mentioned package was opened:

Kind Sir:

Because of my belief that you are the one man who can and will help me, I have selected you from the many visitors that come to this Asylum. I have long awaited your coming and I now hope that my cautious selection will not be unavailing.

Behind the bars of this cell I have been imprisoned the past year. I am without funds or friends. I am a stranger within a strange land. Pray heed my call,

for the thing I ask of you is so small in itself. I seek no alms. Neither do I ask your help in effecting my escape, for I would have you do no wrong.

All I ask is that you take the enclosed letter or report and dispatch it to the parties designated. First, read it yourself; see the vast importance of my communicating with my countrymen; then place it in the proper channels that it may reach those mentioned. It is a little favor I ask; pray do not fail me. I beseech you to make all haste, lest I truly become demented like my fellow prisoners in this madhouse.

MARCUS PUBLIUS.

THE REPORT

GREETINGS O Caesar; Greetings Honorable Senate; Greetings to all Roman Countrymen. I am alive! I, Marcus Publius, have survived! The Great Experiment is a success! Witness my hand as proof, lest someone doubt that I am alive.

I bring great honors to Rome. I have discovered a new and strange land. It is called the United States.

My head is filled with the many wonders I have beheld. My heart is overflowing with the desire to enlighten immediately all Rome with this report. But, I must begin at the beginning, guiding you through my experiences in chronological order, lest my country-

men doubt the truth of this letter, for I, myself, have sometimes doubted if I am really alive and not with the Gods.

I will date the report, *Nov. a. 696, the present date, according to my calculation, although these United Statesians term it November, 1928 A.D.

It will be remembered that on ‡Parilia a. 695 all Rome was agog over the embarking of the Cask. I had offered myself as a martyr to science, and after a night of feasting and many toasts, I submitted to the Committee's administering of a sleep-endowing drug. I knew of naught until I was revived one year later, Aprilis a. 696, by a citizen of this United States, although he contended that many years had passed. My rescuer called himself Professor Emil Haskell and gave me a detailed account of the condition in which I was found.

The Professor was a very learned man, well versed in the science and arts of this land. While on a private expedition of deep-sea research, in what he called tropical waters, he discovered the Cask floating near his private yacht. Puzzled by the appearance of this "cake of ice" in a warm sea, he had the Cask lifted aboard by means of the yacht's boat davits.

* The author translates: ‡Parilia a. 695 as April 21, 59 B.C. Nov. a. 696 as November, 58 B.C.

In the hot sun on the dry deck of the yacht, the frosty coating on the Cast soon disappeared and brought forth in clarity the Latin inscription on the outer casing. Professor was overjoyed with his discovery, when he read:

"Whosoever findeth this Cask will leave it unopened and immediately communicate with the Society of Roman Medical Scientists, provided the discovery is made one year later than the date, Parilia a. 696. This Cask contains a living man whose life has been preserved as an experiment in science and any premature tampering with or opening of this vessel will result in the occupant's death. Persons finding this Cask will keep it covered from the sun's rays, as the occupant is "frozen" in liquid oil at an extremely low temperature. Take heed, for this Cask is under the seal of Julius Cæsar."

Accepting the inscription at its face value, Professor Haskell immediately returned to his dwelling on Riverside Drive in the city of New York of this United States. During the trip homeward, he planned in detail the task of my revival, and it was due to this careful advanced thought and to Professor Haskell's wonderfully trained mind, that I am alive today. Had someone of lesser mentality made the discovery, I fear that I should

not have survived to write this report.

Jealously guarding his secret from all, the Professor had the Cask placed in his private laboratory, and after gathering the necessary equipment, he proceeded to bring me back to life. A week later, after I had fully recovered he showed me the remains of the Cask and explained each step he made in effecting my survival.

He spoke first of removing the outer covering without much difficulty, but was dismayed upon hearing the hissing noise as he punctured the second covering until he discovered that it was only the releasing of the vacuum insulation. He then noticed that the coating of frost on the inner copper tank was becoming heavier, and he hurriedly effected an opening large enough to admit light. Upon looking down, he was startled to see me in full view lying within, since he expected to find some other inner container. As will be remembered, the preserving oil in which I was immersed was of a clear straw color and came from our deep well at the very low temperature; or of 126 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit, according to the Professor's scale. These United Statesians measured heat and cold in degrees and their freezing point was 32 degrees above zero. Thus, the Professor estimated that our

oil was really 158 degrees below freezing. He defined the oil as being a mixture of oil and about 80 per-cent of what he termed carbon dioxide gas, with a small portion of helium.

Professor Haskell claimed to be very well acquainted with our low temperature oil of Rome, and he said there was another oil-well which produced a similar mixture in this country at a place he called Jackson County, Colorado. The well in this county had been worked for commercial use, the oil being heated by pipes of live steam, until the substance was of an atmospheric temperature. I give this information to show that Professor Haskell was familiar with our fluid and knew the conditions under which he was working.

Unaffected by the shock of seeing my body in plain view, the Professor immediately made a larger hole in the Cask and drained off the oil. Insulating his hands with heavy towels, Professor Haskell then removed my body to a small cell where he had formerly kept a large gorilla for experimental purposes. He then wrapped me in what he termed electrical blankets and by carefully regulating the applied heat he brought my body back to normal temperature. At the right moment, he injected into my heart a drug known as adrenalin, which started pulsation and re-

stored animation. Thus did I again become alive.

It is needless to state that, had not this United States drug adrenalin been recently discovered and available, and had not Professor Haskell been acquainted with its use, I should have perished in vain as soon as my body had attained normal temperature. The Professor evidently felt very sure of himself, as he gave no thought of having violated the order of the Society of Roman Medical Scientists and seemed to care not that he had broken the seal of Julius Caesar when he opened the Cask.

The reason for Professor Haskell's placing me in the small cell was soon apparent. He wanted to keep me a prisoner until he had finished writing a book. Daily he would visit me, and after supplying food and water, he would question me for hours at a time. I could see no wrong in telling him of the wonders of our Rome, of our manner of living, and of all the facts concerning our great statesmen. In exchange, he taught me his native language, called English. He was congenial in every respect, but insisted that I remain confined in the cell. After a month of this, I noticed him tittering and chuckling to himself at times, and I reasoned that he must be going mad. He practically confirmed this view one day when he boastfully de-

clared that sweet revenge was soon to be his. He told me that he had nearly finished his book and that it would revolutionize all history and make his fellow scientists look ridiculous. I realized that I had been liberated from the Cask by a maniac, only to be made a captive again.

DAILY I watched for a chance to escape from my cell, but Professor Haskell was as crafty as he was learned, and always was careful to remain at a safe distance, lest I reach him through the bars.

The more I talked and listened to him, the more I realized that he was on the verge of total insanity. His wonderful brain had reached the snapping point, undoubtedly the fruits of mental over-development, and his neglect of physical exercise. In desperation I racked my brain for a plan whereby I could obtain freedom before it was too late.

In order that my countrymen may know the condition of my captor's mind and in justification of my later action to obtain freedom, I shall cite a few examples of the idiotic statements Professor Haskell often made and would have me believe.

He would have it that the land and sea were round like a ball. I did my best to nullify this mad hallucination, repeating to him time and again that we Romans

have long since known the world to be flat. I even told him of those who had been to the top of mountains and had proved this flat-theory by viewing the straight line of the horizon. But all of this was of no avail as Professor Haskell was very set in his views, like all men of science who have their own pet theories.

He even went so far as to say that the land and sea moved. The Professor thought that the sun was more or less stationary and that it was the Earth that moved—everything turning over during the night. This, he claimed, caused the sun to appear to rise and set, while it was the land that actually moved. I assured him that this was not the case, as I had frequently been up all night on affairs with ladies, and although the land did seem to be a bit unsteady at times, it was nothing but the result of drinking too much wine. I further assured him that I had often watched shadows of our buildings slowly crawl across the promenade of the Forum, thus proving that the sun moved.

Professor Haskell was at his worst when he would have me believe that there was no Great Edge to the Sea. He contended that the water of the Sea bent around a curve. This seemed to be the most idiotic of all his statements, save one, for it is evident to the most uneducated

person that water is always flat and level. How could it be otherwise?

According to the Professor, his United States was around this bend from Rome. He claimed to know all about our land and acted very superior when discussing maps and countries. Nevertheless, I noticed that he continually questioned me regarding our cities, the construction of our buildings and homes, and upon all matters concerning our Republic. This was very strange action, indeed; for one who was supposed to know as much as Professor Haskell pretended.

THE most colossal falsity the Professor would have me swallow, was that I am 2013 years old. He estimated that our Parilia a. 695 was really what he termed April 21, 59 (Before his God was discovered). He claimed that the present date was 1928 (After his God was discovered). Knowing my age was twenty-five upon entry, as I had told him that was my age, he figured that I had been confined in the Cask some 1988 years.

I believe that he was trying to beat down my spirit by casting reflections upon my intellect. However, I was not fooled nor would I allow my brain to become muddled with his wild assertions. I could see for myself that I had

not aged physically, and by clever questioning, I secured his admission that we were just finishing the Winter Season. Thus, as I had embarked last Spring, it was easy to deduce that only a year had passed since I entered the Cask. I was not to be fooled simply because the United States had their own trick calendar, a calendar based on the time they discovered that there was a God.

I wondered what they would do when they discovered that there are many Gods.

Professor Haskell often admired my physical development. He would stand and watch the knotting and bunching of my rippling muscles as I daily disrobed and performed the National Roman Calisthenic Drill. While I am only physically equal to the average Roman citizen, I was far superior to Professor Haskell; he being little more in body than a well developed child. I finally conceived a plan whereby I could use his admiration for my strength as a means of escape.

Striking a boastful pose, I called him and offered to show how easily I could crush the back of a chair in my cell. This started a little game in which he furnished articles, such as sticks and beams, to test my strength. Cunningly I played the game until finally he unthinkingly offered the article I long desired. It was a short piece of metal rod that he

had used to open the Cask. He called it a crowbar.

With assumed difficulty, I bent the bar across my knee and, with the right degree of aloofness, tossed it on the floor within my cell. Soon after, Professor Haskell left the laboratory and gave me the opportunity I had long awaited.

Straightening out the crowbar, I reached through the bars of the cell and used it to twist off the little lock that held the door. To one who was familiar with the Roman lever principles it required little effort to destroy this fastening.

Gathering my toga about the waist, I crouched by the wall near the door and waited the Professor's return.

MY ever burning desire to forge ahead of the natural sequence of events and blurt forth in loud acclaim the many wonders of this newly discovered land, the United States, has been hard to withstand. Roman Citizens, I can picture you standing in rapt attention before the Senate as my humble report is read from the rostrum. Your eagerness to learn of the miracles I have beheld is no greater than my desire to enrich your knowledge. But I feel that I must continue in logical order, giving each event as it happened, lest some may misconstrue the hap-

penings which I later reveal. However, I promise that your wait will not be in vain, when you hear of my stroll along New York's thoroughfares.

While crouching near the door, I thought over a plan of action. It was one whereby I could dispose of the Professor in the shortest time possible. I was eager to have him out of the way to be able to set out on my own, in quest of new adventures, for I had become weary of the sight of the four walls in which I had been held captive for over a month. True, there were appliances within the laboratory that I wished to learn more about, for the Professor had jealously withheld any information except that regarding my study of English. But, somehow I felt that I must flee the confinement I had endured and again breathe pure air with the sky overhead. A month's imprisonment had given me the heart of a woman, and I had caught myself in moods of sympathy with our galley-slaves.

At last I heard the approach of footsteps. I tensed my muscles in readiness. My chance for freedom had arrived.

True to habit, the Professor opened the door and strode a full six paces before he realized I was not within the cell. I was upon him in a flash and bowled him over with one blow. Quickly placing him in the cell, I twisted the

crowbar around the door and made a much better fastener than the flimsy padlock. Gathering my toga about me, I fled through the door from which the Professor had just entered. I quickly mounted a stairway.

At the top of this stairs I encountered another door that barred the way. It was a strong wooden panel, and contained within the edge was a new type of fastener, quite unlike the padlock of the cell. A small knob protruded just below a little metal disc. It offered practically no working area for any Roman lever principle that I might have employed. I searched in vain for a solution to the secret, straining against the panel with my strong shoulders. But the door was well made and withstood all my efforts. I later learned that the door could have been easily opened with a small notched metal strip that fits in the little disc above the handle. It was known as a Yale key and I was told that many young United Statesians in the Yale school carried these keys. They were used for private apartments.

Returning to the laboratory, I perceived that the Professor had recovered consciousness. Straightway he began begging for his release. I admired the Professor's nerve, but turned a deaf ear to his pleas, for I thought that he deserved a bit of

his own medicine. I also gave him to understand that the only thing that had restrained me from twisting his neck was the fact that he had found the Cask and had restored my life. Nevertheless, I believe he realized that one should not imprison a Roman Citizen.

I searched the room for some other means of escape while Professor Haskell watched me with his hawk-like eyes. Evidently the laboratory had been constructed in the cellar of his home, for I noticed that the walls were of a stone composition and that two small windows were up near the ceiling. They were closed by shutters on the outside. While I was making this survey, my attention was attracted to the construction overhead. Small boards had been used to make the floor above. Although the cross beams between were of heavy wood, this boarding above appeared to be of light material. I also noted two long white shafts hanging a short distance from the ceiling. I later learned that these were heat pipes containing steam. They offered an ideal foothold in a new plan that quickly came to my mind.

With the aid of a small box I was able to mount these shafts. They felt soft and warm to the touch. In this manner I secured a position on my back with my feet against the small boarding

above. Using my arms to assist the knee leverage, I was able to exert considerable force, and soon I had a few boards kicked loose from their fastenings. Then it was comparatively easy to push my foot through to the floor above and create an opening large enough to admit my body.

PROFESSOR HASKELL made one last gesture to detain me when he saw that I had met with success and would soon be free. This last effort resulted in the finish of his brilliant career as it was destined to cost him his life. No doubt his act would have taken my life also, had I not been well trained in the Roman art of leaping. But it was perhaps best that he ended as he did, for I was convinced that he was totally insane.

I suspected nothing when he asked that I hand him his unfinished manuscript of history that lay on the table. He intimated that he might as well work in the cell until some of his servants came and released him. I came down from my perch in the ceiling to grant his last wish. As I gave him his work he thanked me and gave vent to a low sigh. I now see that his sigh was in relief over having his manuscript in a safe place remote from the scene of my intended extermination.

I should have been suspicious

when he tendered me his purse filled with United States paper money. I well know that men of science are not usually susceptible to the passion of charity. However, I accepted his donation as a form of Roman levy. It seemed natural for him to want me to have some funds when starting out alone in a strange land. I could not suspect his real motive; that of having me appear to be a dead thief, if his diabolical scheme had proved successful.

As I turned to go, Professor Haskell ventured that I could extinguish his little electrical stove on which he was brewing a bowl of brownish liquid called coffee. He seemed to think that the coffee would boil over before his servants came to his rescue. Although I was unfamiliar with the mechanism of this electrical device, I wanted to make the Professor as comfortable as possible. I felt like a young husband ready to go out on a party with a purse full of money and freedom in the offing. Any little whim the Professor had in mind was proper to be granted.

Seeing that I fumbled with the electrical stove, he advised me that the best method of extinguishing it was to immerse it in a pail of water. I could pour this from a large red container at hand. Eager to serve him, I poured out the liquid. It was as clear as spring water, but had a

pungent odor. I thought this was due to stagnation. Little did I suspect that this liquid was highly explosive. It was called gasoline. A sudden desire to hurry and quit the place made me toss the stove in the open pail from a short distance instead of immersing it as the Professor directed. This saved my life. For immediately the liquid flared up in a great flame that would have consumed me had I been standing over the pail. Leaping back, I was just barely able to clear the fire. Professor Haskell fell in a swoon when he perceived that I had escaped his fiery death trap.

I saw at a glance that I just had time to make my exit through the opening above if I hurried. I noticed that the fire was growing in volume, as I climbed quickly aloft. The spreading flames were igniting the oil that had been drained from the Cask. During the past month this oil had been left standing in a huge open tub and had resumed a normal temperature as all of the carbon dioxide had escaped. The heat was terrific as the new flames flared up like burning pitch.

By a superhuman effort, I managed to crawl out of the opening and roll over on the floor above, while the flames began licking up through the hole. I lay for an instant thinking of the Professor's fate. I would much rather

have had the pleasure of seeing him fed to the lions in our dear old Coliseum.

After a deep breath or two, I arose and wandered through many rooms and pasageways. Not a soul was in sight and I finally found an outer door that opened on a court in the rear of the dwelling. Unnoticed, I managed to run across this court. With a quick leap, I scaled a high wall that surrounded the estate and dropped into a small street. I later learned that this street was only an alley. The streets of this United States are great wide thoroughfares and even this alley was quite wide compared to our streets of Rome. Hurrying along, I soon came upon one of these spacious thoroughfares. At last I was free!

FREE at last on the streets of the United States! Yet I saw nothing! As much as I would like to tell you Romans of what I first witnessed; as much as I would like to know myself; verily I can remember nothing. Looking back on my first moments of freedom, I realize that my mind did not absorb any of the many wonders I must have witnessed. When I walked away from the inferno that I had started in the Professor's laboratory, I was blind to everything but the path before me. I had just tasted the first draught of a newly discovered

wine Freedom! A month's imprisonment in Professor Haskell's cell, followed by my sudden liberation, had made me experience a new form of intoxication.

Freedom! Wine of wines! Freedom, a drink entirely unknown to one who is a Roman Citizen. My blood tingled in great ecstasy as I felt the fire of Freedom's nectar; a nectar such as is sipped only in dreams. Oh, men of Rome, I entreat you to try a taste of my newfound vintage. Bind yourself as a slave unto a stranger for a month only. Mingle and work with the slaves, and when the time is up, verily, I prophesy that you will enjoy a drink many times worthy of your exile. Our best wine, Nassicum, will seem like grape husks compared to this new quaff. You will, as never before, appreciate the freedom of Roman Citizenship. Have a little drink on me!

I have recalled one thing that came to my notice. The street which I had chosen was as smooth as polished stone. But I might as well have been strolling on any one of our rough, narrow thoroughfares in Rome, for all else I can recall. I could not even remember the same street, should I happen on it again. Thus was the condition of my mind.

However, at the next intersection, I was rudely awakened from my haziness. Terror filled my heart. Yea, terror! Even if I

am a Roman Citizen! For I was confronted with a fiendish monster. To my intimate friends, that will sound as if I had become like a woman, for it is well known that I fear nothing mortal. My bravery upon entering the Cask should prove my courage and fearlessness. But I defy any Roman—yea, even the mighty Julius Caesar himself, as brave as he is known to be to have stood in my place and to have felt other than afraid. I was alone, a stranger, a newborn babe, in a land of seeming terrors and mysteries. I was encompassed by the unknown. I was confronted with a thing that had the broken unrealities of a phantasm. Hear me, as I tell of what I saw.

My eyes were on the pathway. I had nearly reached the corner. Suddenly bedlam broke loose. A piercing eerie cry rent the air, an uncanny wail of rising cadences. It seemed to pour ice into my veins. At the same moment, a hundred bells started clanging. The crash of a thousand thunders roared about my ears. I looked up to see many Citizens scurrying from the streets. Chaos was everywhere!

Looking down the cross avenue, I beheld an ungodly sight. A huge red land-monster was coming to recapture me. In great lurching leaps and bounds it came directly for me. It was as tall as two men and as long as a small ship. Two

great eyes as large as the moon hungrily sought me out from the crowd. Men were clinging to the sides of the monster, urging it on to greater speed. In a glance I saw another similar monster was immediately behind the first. Off in the distance others were following.

Turning to flee, I saw that my path was cut off by still others approaching from the rear. What chance of freedom, I thought, had one in a land where they send shrieking red monsters lumbering after their captives? I closed my eyes and awaited the end. My head was held erect. My chest thrust forward. I stood like a true Roman, unflinchingly awaiting death.

But my time had not yet come!

WITH a thundering roar that made the very ground upon which I stood tremble, the monster swept past me. Opening my eyes I was just in time to see the second monster pass. I gave vent to a low chuckle of relief. For I saw that my fear was groundless. Again I was a true Roman who laughs when close death is thought to have passed. I saw that what I had thought were huge red land-monsters, were only fire-fighting machines used in the United States. Their piercing cry and clanging bells were only to clear the path. My recapture was not wanted. Again I

laughed to compose myself, for verily, I will admit I was afraid.

Noting that the machines had stopped a short distance down the street, I hurried along to examine them better. And what marvels I beheld. They were a sort of chariot . . . a four- or six-wheeled chariot. And the most amazing part was that they had moved at terrific speed without the aid of horses. Pails, axes, ladders, bells and great sections of fiber pipe adorned the chariots in a very decorative manner. Numerous special fittings glistened like polished gold. At the forward end was the device that propelled the machine in place of horses. It was called the Engine. It breathed in loud, puffing snorts. It was this noise that I had first thought was thunder. This snorting and blowing was cleverly controlled by a man in charge. The Engine was used, even when the machine was stationary, to blow water through the fiber pipes with tremendous force. The other end of the pipes was then directed on the fire, the water shooting out in great fountains. The two large eyes as big as moons were great lanterns. They were used to throw out piercing beams of light whenever the chariot traveled at night. The entire body of the machine was painted a violent red.

Great was the admiration of the United States Citizens for their fire-fighting chariots. A

vast throng had quickly gathered to witness it in operation. A stout rope was immediately stretched waist high across the street to hold back the surging multitude. A large black-covered horseless-chariot brought a squad of ushers to the scene. They immediately began their duties of keeping the crowd behind the rope. These ushers were very important individuals, whose sharp, nasal voices bespoke of earlier training as auctioneers or fish merchants. I know now that they were the city guards, called Cops. I had occasion later to know them intimately.

Suddenly there was a loud explosion across the street. Smoke and flames burst from every window of a magnificent stone castle. I realized that this was Professor Haskell's dwelling and that I was the one who had started the fire. I stood in awe, watching the great billows of smoke and streaming tongues of flame as they leaped skyward. Professor Haskell must have kept other explosive liquids in his laboratory, and the fire had taken a little time to reach them. However, the flames were enveloping the entire building and reminded me of our Vesuvius.

Strange to relate, the men in charge of the fire-fighting machines gave no heed to the burning building. Instead they directed their streams of water on the

adjoining houses, which were not burning at all. This seemed a very queer way to put out a fire. But I reasoned that the men must have had a certain system of procedure; and I did not feel called upon to offer any advice. Perhaps they also knew the Professor.

Realizing that the house would be a total loss and that everything in it would be consumed, I slowly withdrew from the front ranks. I tried to attract as little attention as possible for I knew that if I was suspected in the least I should be subjected to severe questioning. Even though I felt that I could cope with any inquiry that might arise—for I have had much training in the art of Roman evasion—I perceived that my task would be very difficult, as the last shreds of my identity must have been obliterated in the fire. Little did I then realize that I should later wish that I had stepped forward and made myself known. Some evidence might have then been saved. But at the time, I gave no thought to this. My sole idea was to place as much distance as possible between myself and the fire.

AS I strolled away from the conflagration, I began seeing so many wonders at once that it is hard for me to set them down in any order of recognition.

I have said that I was in the

United States. This was true, but I was also in the largest city in the country—New York. I have long since learned, from contact with the many natives of this New York, that it is the only city of any consequence. However, there are a few other cities out in a part of the country known as the Sticks. Hereafter, I will speak of being in New York, and it will be understood that I also mean the United States.

On my right was a large river named the Hudson. It looked like our Tiber River except that the boats did not have any sails. While some of the vessels were small and similar to our war-barges, there were also others of great size. These massive ships carried many passengers and were called Ferries and Steamers. I thought these must be the biggest ships human hands could construct, but I later witnessed a marvelous colossal floating city, a huge ship made entirely of metal and as great in size as a whole section of Rome. As I said, none of the ships had sails. They were all propelled by an Engine similar to that of the fire-fighting chariots. In fact, the Engine was one of the most wonderful and useful inventions of this land. It was used in almost every conceivable manner whenever energy or power was required.

I suspect that scores of Roman citizens are already doubting my

word, for I know that it is hard for one to believe that there could be any ships as large as I have mentioned. It must be equally as hard for you Romans to picture a little metal Engine doing the work of thousands of horses. But I swear on my honor as a Roman citizen that these truths are just as I have pictured them. Pray treat my report with an open mind, for even more fantastic things are yet to come—Ships that fly, Electricity, Radio, Pictures that move and talk, Subways—but wait, I must not go ahead of my story. I only hope that it will be remembered that I have investigated every thing about which I write. I have fully recovered from my first fear of the supernatural. I no longer look upon fire-fighting apparatus as land-monsters. I am counting on the belief of you men of Rome, who saw me placed in the Cask, for I am now in bondage again, because the citizens of this great New York will not believe that I arrived in that manner. These people who have created unbelievable wonders are quick to doubt a lesser wonder. They call me The Ice Man because I tried to tell them that I was frozen in the Cask for a year. The Cops have—but, again I am wandering from my report. Oh, if I were only the Great Cicero! If I could only tell my story in logical order! But I am only Marcus Publius, and you

Romans will have to make allowances for my lapses. I will try again to stick to my report.

I WAS turning away from the river when I beheld the next wonder. Suddenly a strange buzzing noise fell upon my ears. It was like the whirling drone of a giant bee. Looking towards the sky from which the sound came, I beheld five huge birds flying in wedge-shaped order. Even at their great height I saw that the birds were of a strange species, unknown to me. Their peculiar droning buzz beat upon my ears like staccato thunder. As I looked, they began to fall. In a series of fluttering, spinning spirals they came, until I thought they would be dashed on the ground. Even as I watched, they regained their equilibrium and skillfully glided down to skim across the river. I held my breath in wonder as they gracefully came to rest on the water's smooth surface. I stared in open-mouthed amazement over their great bulk and wondered how such gigantic birds could have been caught and tamed. Looking closer I beheld a sight that nearly swept me off my feet. A citizen was actually emerging from the bird's mouth. I could hardly believe my eyes. More citizens came forth—six in all. They gleefully waved to passengers on a passing ship.

At last it finally dawned on me

that I was witnessing another strange marvel of this New York. Inventions of the Gods! The huge birds were great man-made flying-ships.

I saw that the flying-ships were shaped very much like a bird in full flight. The wings did not fold up, but remained stiffly outstretched, even after the flight was over. A large wind-mill had been placed in the nose of the device. Another of those Engines was used to turn this wind-mill at great speed; the force thus sucked the flying-ship through the air. These flying-ships were called airplanes. There were no feathers on the devices.

Turning away I made a vow that I would seek a flight in one of these airplanes at the first opportunity. I walked along in deep thought, wondering over the possibilities of an early return to Rome in an airplane. What a greeting I would receive when I glided down on the surface of the Tiber. I would be a hero. Ney, the hero of all times. With my private airplane I could lead great armies on to new victories. With a load of stones, I could easily conquer the strongest cities. I would be made king! Ladies would flock to me in droves; riches and luxuries would be mine for the asking. My poetry would rival Virgil's. Ha! such is the power of thought. Verily, what Roman would not have let

his mind run astray in the midst of such super-geniuses of invention as these New Yorkians? Yea, and I am a Roman.

I continued on my walk. On my left hand were large castles where one of a select four hundred persons lived. There were four hundred such castles like these in New York, each housing one of this same select four hundred. A short distance away were the towering dwellings of the more common people. The common people had to live four hundred in one house. These buildings were constructed much the same as ours, except that they rose to dizzy heights. High rents also prevailed here, as in Rome.

The streets were filled with long lines of swiftly moving chariots or carts. They were luxurious affairs, gaudy and brilliant in highly polished colors. The expressions on the faces of the occupants bespoke the pride of their owners. Again, the Engine was used to propel these glorious chariots along the glistening streets. Instead of the outer edges of the streets being ground in hides or leather, as are our chariots, they were covered by a smooth-fitting fabric rim. These rims contained air under pressure. The fabric was called Rubber and was another wonderful discovery of this land. Like the Engine, it had been put to many uses, and because of its flexibility

and water-shedding quality, it was of great value as a cloak in the rain. This Rubber could be made either soft or hard and was manufactured into thousands of different articles for daily use throughout the United States. Later on, I found that the Rubber was made into little sticks, five to a package. Many citizens chewed these little sticks as they strolled along. No doubt the idea came from the cow.

AFTER a glance around the horizon, it was perhaps natural that I, a Roman, should next be attracted by New York's native females.

My friends in Rome will vouch, that while I have delved deeply into scientific matters I have, with all other Romans, not neglected the physical. Although I was not considered a connoisseur of women, I have had my little moments. For I am a Roman. I dare say that any of my fellow countrymen would have been likewise enthralled should they have witnessed the enchanting creatures that I beheld. I must control my emotions as I write, lest I overdo the thing.

The main attraction of these New York ladies was their style of dress. However, their faces were also very beautiful to look upon, when one took occasion to look. But their costumes were the main enticement.

Each and every one was clothed in a single short garment that fell to a point just above the knees. Just above the knees. . . . I swear to it! This garment was made of a glossy shimmering fabric and clung to the shapely bodies as if the owners had just been immersed in the river and were walking along dripping wet and slippery. The legs of these fair creatures were clothed in a similar fabric but of much thinner texture, that actually being possible. It was like looking through wisps of wind-blown cobwebs. This shimmering fabric was called Silk. It was made in various hues and shades and was truly a godsend to womankind, for it was even more appealing than the nude.

I stood still for a moment, my heart filled with rapture over seeing such a wonderful parade of treasures. These lovely creatures strolled along apparently ignorant of the fact that every movement was clearly defined by the twitching of the Silk. I thought of the feast this sight would be for those friends of mine back in heavily swathed Rome. Even dusky Egypt had nothing like this!

With a chuckle of glee, I thought of you Romans having to be content with watching the damsels meander about the Forum in their concealing Pallas and Stolas. Ah! but here in New

York a slight gust showed me visions above the knee. Verily, the dress of the ladies was one of the most revealing sights of this great New York.

My past experience with the fair ladies of Rome had taught me that beauty of the face did not necessarily continue under the Palla. Here in New York there was no doubt whatsoever. For a man could really trust his vision.

Thinking that I would enjoy the companionship of one of these fair exhibits, I straightway tried to make the acquaintance of the next beautiful lady who passed. To my surprise, my only reward was a baleful glance of disdain. By no means discouraged, I approached many others, some even more beautiful than the first. But I was rebuffed at every turn. While some of the ladies did smile and giggle, the net result was anything but complimentary to one who had always considered himself a first-rate Roman lover.

I reasoned that perhaps my mode of dress was distasteful to them. It must be remembered that I was dressed in our native Roman garb and that I was quite different in appearance from the rest of the men in New York. Although my toga displayed my strong, manly arms to good advantage, it was entirely unlike the male attire of this land. The New York male garments were

of an unusual pattern. However, they were very pleasing to the eye and made a practical mode of dress for those who rushed about in a great hurry. The upper part of this costume consisted of a short, tight-fitting jacket with long sleeves that entirely concealed the muscles of the arm, if there were any. The lower portion of the garment consisted of two long loose tubes that were joined at the waist. They were called pants. These pants were ideal for hiding undeveloped legs, as they gave no hint whatsoever as to what they concealed. The wide effect at the bottom lent a very substantial appearance to the wearer. I resolved that I would postpone my campaign with the ladies until I could procure similar raiment for myself.

For the first time, it struck me as queer that my own attire had attracted little or no attention. There I was, strolling about the streets of New York clad in my native Roman Toga, with my Tunica underneath, but all the attention I aroused was a casual glance here and there. Had one of the New Yorkers been in the same position in Rome, he would have been an object of interest for the multitude. But here in this country, where men pay little heed to the dress of their women—that is, compared to my interest—what could be expected of their notice of a man's?

ANOTHER peculiar thing I noticed at that time was that most of the men were eating smoke. This smoke was obtained by sucking on a small fire at the outer end of a short white stick which was carried in the mouth. I later learned that these white sticks contained a peculiar weed known as Tobacco. The sticks were called Cigarettes. I have since tried to use one of them myself, but the smoke always got in my lungs and choked me.

Evidently the art of eating smoke could be learned in time, for every male in sight had a little cloud of smoke about his head. Even the females smoked while riding in their chariots! But my own personal opinion was that the Cigarette had been over-spoken. As in Rome, many things in New York had secured followers by being over-spoken. They called it advertising in this country.

Oh, yes, another thing! All the male citizens wore odd-shaped helmets. They looked like small inverted bows and some were folded or creased at the top. I did not particularly notice the ladies' headgear. However I distinctly remember that their shoes were pushed up in the rear on slender peg-like stilts. This gave an appearance of smallness even to large feet.

Speaking of the ladies again reminds me that the eyes of the males were equipped with two

small windows of transparent glass. The glass was not unlike our glass . . . from which we make our small perfume flasks . . . excepting that it was so curved as to magnify the objects of vision. The little windows, held in place by two long hooks that fastened over the ears, turned with the head as the eyes were focused from one lady to the next. This was the reason the men appeared not to be looking at the ladies. Only one glance was required to bring the magnified beauty before their eyes. Verily, I yearned for a pair of these little windows for my own use. Even one or two of the ladies wore the device, although these ladies were of the older type. Looking for a desirable husband, no doubt.

I next beheld some of New York's wonderful buildings. They were of tremendous height and faced close to the edge of the street. Nothing will ever stir me as did my first sight of these colossal structures. Like the sheer walls of a mountain defile they towered to unbelievable heights. Their topmost points seemed to scrape the clouds. Ye Gods, what an awful mess there would certainly be if one of them ever toppled over!

However, as gigantic as the structures were, they lacked the grace and beauty of our Roman buildings. There was a marked absence of any columns or arches.

Their walls were straight and flat, though pierced by many hundreds of windows, and the whole unit looked like a vast pile of stone blocks. True, there were some of the low buildings that had a few columns in the front, and here and there a small arch graced an entranceway. But the great majority of them were built on the ugly Egyptian style of the obelisk.

I was glad to see that we Romans were very far in advance of these New Yorkers in the art and the beauty of architecture.

ONE or two of the buildings were in the process of being built, and I had an opportunity to discover a group of marvelous inventions that were in common use in this land. Only a few men were at work on the buildings, but I was able to gather much information from the large crowd watching the construction. The builders were experts at their trade as the structures were completed in a very short space of time. However, the watchers were also experts and they often argued among themselves as to whether the workers were doing the job right or not.

The skeletons of the buildings were made of great beams of metal known as Steel. This Steel was a metal similar to our iron. In fact iron-ore had been heated until all impurities and sulphur

had passed off. Then the exact amount of carbon and other secret ingredients were added to produce the required strength of Steel. The Steel was very strong and almost as hard as some of our copper. I was later gratified to learn that we Romans were also far in advance of these New Yorkers in the matter of hardening copper. Oh, there was no doubt but what these New Yorkers had some wonderful inventions and tricks. But I never lost sight of the fact that we Romans had a trick or two ourselves. One or two of the natives did not care to hear about this, so I refrained from bringing it up during the rest of the conversation on building.

The great Steel beams were lifted into place on the skeleton-work by flexible Steel ropes. These ropes were attached to devices such as our pulley-system and the pulling was done by another of those Engines. It appeared that almost everything in New York was made of Steel or Rubber and was called a Machine and was run with an Engine.

Great Machines mixed concrete, made with our Roman cement, and poured it into wood frames built around the steel beams. This method had quite an advantage over our method of hand-mixing concrete.

We should have been greatly assisted in constructing our great

Aqua Marica if we had had one of those mixing Machines.

One other thing these New Yorkers had learned better than we Romans ever did, was the art of manufacturing glass in great sheets. I was informed that they rolled the glass instead of blowing it. These immense glass sheets were placed on the front of the building to keep the citizens from stealing the various pieces of merchandise on display.

All of a sudden I realized that I had not eaten since morning. Professor Haskell had given me some food during the third hour, but in the excitement of my escape and of seeing so many wonderful sights, I had forgotten all about eating again. Seeing that it was nearly sunset or at least the eleventh hour, I hunted for a place where I could purchase food with the paper money from the Professor's purse.

My nose soon-directed me to a place from which the smell of cooking was issuing with a very noticeable and agreeable aroma.

A LARGE sheet of glass covered the front of this eating place and enabled one to whet his appetite from watching others eat. Upon entering, I first noticed a long row of discs that were mounted on short pedestals. On these discs were perched many citizens and it reminded me of my pet monkey.

Unlike us Romans, the New Yorkers have yet to learn how much the stomach suffers when one tries to eat in a seated position. Some day these people will learn that a reclining posture, when one is dining, minimizes the strain on the organs. Some day they will learn that the throat muscles were intended to force the food into the stomach. They will learn of the necessary gland-fluids that are to be mixed with the food as it slowly passes along the throat. Watching their animals eat would tell them that. How these people could stand the shock of dropping food and drink directly into their stomachs was more than I could understand. What, with eating while seated and with eating smoke, it was no wonder all New Yorkers looked so frail and sickly.

Approaching a counter that separated the discs or stools from the rest of the place, I encountered a very beautiful damsel. She wore a fetching blue and white costume and must have been the proprietress. She gave me a glass of water and a card and with a damp cloth she wiped a brown stain from off the polished counter. I demanded meat, bread, and drink . . . any wine she might have, would do.

The fair lady gave every indication that she thought I was intoxicated. At last my difference of dress was noticed. She asked

me if I had not been in a "joint." And she wanted to know what kind of a place it was where they sent a "guy" home in a sheet. My friendly smile put a stop to any further questions and she straightway brought forth victuals. Three or four metal eating-implements were also served with the food. But I chose to spend no time learning the use of these tools, for I was very hungry. Besides, nothing will ever be invented that would improve on our good old Roman style of eating with the fingers.

All would have gone well had I not forgotten myself and tried to recline on the tops of those stools. The discs revolved with lightning speed and I fell to the floor. This act caused me no little discomfiture and gave reason for considerable mirth to those assembled. My head had received a good sound thump on the stone floor, and I must have staggered a bit when regaining my perch. This settled all doubts of my sobriety in the minds of my associates.

In a measure, my seeming intoxication proved fortunate. For the fair attendant or proprietress became very solicitous regarding my feelings. I soon gained her consent to an invitation to show me the city. I told her that I was a stranger in New York. I then quickly showed her my full purse and thereby overcame her fears

that I had been robbed and was penniless.

She was overjoyed at seeing my great wealth and she said that I could come back for her after an hour had passed. However, she was firm on the point that I must first purchase suitable New York clothes. She told me to procure them in a place around the corner on Broadway Street. I was cautioned that I could find her in this Restaurant which was on Seventy-second Street. She wrote the address down on a piece of tissue E——— Restaurant, 72nd and B'way, and signed her name. It was Kate.

As I stepped outside of the Restaurant I beheld one of the most wonderful sights I had ever seen. Miracle of miracles! Oh, what a sight for one who had only been accustomed to the dark streets of Rome at night. Here in New York the night-time was brighter than the day. Thousands of brightly illuminated globes flooded the street with light. Hundreds of small globes were grouped in weird scrolls and designs that spelled out letters. Each letter flickered off and on in rapid succession. It made me think I had stepped into a fairy-land. Try to imagine each star in the heavens a hundred times brighter! Tint them the colors of the rainbow! Arrange them in patterns like the mosaic of our Temple of Venus and Roma.

Twinkle them on and off! Whirl them around like a thousand comets. Then, my Romans, you will have a vague conception of what I witnessed on Broadway Street at night in this wonderful city of New York. This was called Electricity!

Electricity! Electricity was that "something" that made all of these little globes shine so brightly. Electricity was the force that gave these New Yorkers light, heat, power, music . . . everything that was wonderful. Ah, but what it was and even whence it came, not one citizen in all the land could tell. Nor did anyone know! All they knew was that they had it . . . that they could put it to work. I know that this will sound very silly to all Romans. For we Romans will never rest until we have solved every perplexing mystery. But such was the state of ignorance of the strange people in this very strange land.

I ENTERED the clothing establishment which Kate had told me I would find. It was maintained by an Israelite. With both hands he sold me an outfit such as I desired. It was called a Nifty Suit. I was also supplied with the New York type of footwear and under garments. I was delightfully surprised with my appearance in the large mirror that the Israelite had strategically placed

near his cash box. How I wished that my countrymen could have seen me!

Kate was also delighted with my costume when I returned for her at the Restaurant. She spoke of me as being her "Warm Daddy." Almost everything had some sort of heated temperature in this New York.

Kate further remarked that I looked "swell" although I could not see that my new costume had made me look any fatter. I later learned that most of Kate's language was very different from the English I had learned from Professor Haskell. The real New York language was full of tricks and I soon learned that the Professor had out-traded me. Instead of teaching me the native New York tongue, in exchange for my information on the things of Rome, he had taught me a foreign language. However, if I raised my eyebrows, the New Yorkers were able to understand me, but I could not comprehend one-half of the things they said.

Other languages have many words with the same meaning. But this New York tongue had many meanings for the same word. Their word "CAN" was a good example. This word "CAN" could mean; to be able to do; a small bucket; to discharge one from his job; an automobile; the art of preserving; a men's retreat; the head, as when one was

"off his can;" the middle rear, as when one was "knocked on his can"; dismissal of one's sweetheart; to rush the purchase of beer; to torment a dog; and as an "oil-can" it could mean either an oil-container or just as easily one's brother-in-law.

Kate also spoke the language of the eyes, and in this art she was a fluent speaker. Her eyebrows were little penciled lines, but they made up in movement what they lacked in hair.

Kate led me to a commercial chariot called a taxi. Riding in it was like skimming through the air while one sat on a bed. Our Roman chariots are very poor riding compared to these smooth-running taxis. We were very fortunate in having selected the one taxi in all New York that had the right-of-way privilege over everybody else. After pushing aside one or two other chariots that would not recognize this authority, we arrived at one of the brightest places I have ever seen. It was the place where Forty-second Street made a crossing on Broadway Street. Kate said that it was the Times Square, but I thought that it had been many times divided.

Kate enjoyed my amazement over the bright lights. She stood off at a little distance so that I could look my fill. Taking me by the arm, she then led me to an even brighter spot—the brilliant,

dazzling white entrance to one of New York's cathedrals of amusement.

A soldier of high rank guarded the entranceway of this gorgeous cathedral. He wore an elegant uniform and must have been of the rank of general. Harken unto me, Noble Romans; during the night would be an ideal time to capture this country, as all of the soldiers are placed on guard in these amusement halls. They are so placed to hold the citizens in awe, so that each and every time one will line up and pay the admission toll.

ALL of the art and beauty that the New Yorkers had omitted from their tall buildings had been lavishly applied to the interior of their amusement cathedrals. They are on a par with our Roman interiors. Just inside the doorway stood two or three soldiers of the ranks. They were dressed in uniforms of brilliant hue and they stood quite stiff, lest they wrinkle their garments. Stationed around the hall were many more of these soldiers. They had no lances or spears, but one could readily see from the expression on their faces that they would not be conquered without giving strenuous battle. However, as they were such small, sickly looking soldiers, I believe that I could have conquered a dozen of them at one time.

Magnificent tapestries covered the high walls. These tapestries were made of the silk material and figured with golden dragons whose serpentine bodies shimmered and gleamed in the many-colored lights. A gorgeous carpet covered the entire floor and this, too, was fashioned with golden dragons which seemed to glare at me with fiery eyes as I stepped deep into their soft bodies. Huge vases and odd pieces of furniture with dragon's feet stood at intervals along the wall. Great lamps that looked like suspended waterfalls hung from the doomed ceiling. One was swayed with the colossal luxury and lavish grandeur of the place and I had a feeling of being smothered in gorgeousness. I was in a place called the Movies.

Kate and I were finally led to seats in a dark auditorium. On one wall, facing the seats, was a large picture? When we were situated comfortably in our seats, I wondered why all of the lavish art display had been made on the outside of the auditorium? Why could they not have put some inside with the picture? Why all the fancy trimmings for only a big black-and-white picture? And then I saw! I heard!

The figures in the painting moved . . . they came to life . . . they talked . . . and it was only a picture! Again that breath-taking fright of the su-

pernatural swept over me. I swear on my honor as a Roman Citizen that I was fully conscious when I witnessed this miracle. Not only did the figures in the painting move and talk, but the picture grew dim and faded into another new scene. Still other scenes appeared, more figures came forth . . . until a whole story was unfolded.

I could not explain this mystery any more than I could explain Electricity. It was a form of amusement whose origin was a secret. The citizens were allowed to look at the picture only when it moved. When the action ceased a curtain was dropped in front of the painting. A squadron of musicians was pushed up from the cellar to keep people from mounting the stage, lest they discover the secret of the moving and talking within the painting.

SOON afterwards a new painting appeared and showed citizens playing ball, a game very similar to our Roman pastime. The only difference was that the New Yorkers played on a diamond plot, instead of on a triangle, and they used twelve players at one time instead of our three. However, three of the players were dressed in blue uniforms and seemed to be the best players of the lot. For they kept telling the others what to do to improve their game. One selfish

player in the center, who probably owned the ball, made all the rest wait until he felt like playing. Naturally, the other players did not get very much exercise.

I noticed that one player carried a stick for hitting the ball. But at the time the picture was painted, this fellow with the club was a poor selection. He could not send the ball to the rest of the players. He even knocked the ball over the fence. Finally, in anger, he ran all around the plot and quit. The witnesses jeered him on to a little hole in the wall. They teased him by calling him a "Big Baby." They also called him "Ruth," a feminine name.

After the ball-game painting faded out, the lights flared up and I had to release Kate from my embrace. We left the auditorium.

Kate proved to be a really wonderful girl. She seemed to have caught the spirit of the occasion, for she tried to show me everything that she thought I would consider unusual or mystifying. I had informed her that I was not acquainted with many things in New York which were common affairs to anyone else. She had deduced this in advance and thought it not unusual as I had recently arrived from Rome. She said that there were many strangers and foreigners in New York. In fact she had personally met many of my own countrymen who

had been in this land for some time and who were then in the fruit and shoe-polishing profession. Kate, like the Professor, spoke of knowing all about our city of Rome and declared that our citizens were well known here in New York. She admitted that they all were in need of knowledge. For, most of them were struck dumb with the strange sights they had beheld. She said that now all Romans were called Wops.

I secured her promise that on the morrow I could meet these fellow Romans. Undoubtedly they were some of our sailors whom we had given up as lost over the great Edge of the Sea. I cannot blame them for not wanting to return to Rome after having discovered this wonderful United States and New York City. It would be a very attractive port for any sailor. What, with the New York ladies parading around the streets dressed in their swaddling clothes, together with all of the wonder of this strange land, it would have been very easy for a Roman sailor to forget that he had a wife back home. Especially would it be so, when he knew that the wife believed him lost at sea!

Stopping in front of a brightly lighted shop, Kate asked me if I would like to talk over the telephone and listen to a Phonograph and Radio. I assured her that

such was my fondest desire, for I had visions of our entering another darkened auditorium where Kate could again snuggle close in my arms. However, the darkened retreat was not forthcoming as she instead guided me into a brightly lighted shop.

INSIDE the shop were many boxes and cabinets. In one of these boxes I found the Telephone. It was a large cupboard-like box, and contained a small Electrical device by which one could converse with another at a great distance. Calling in a loud voice was unnecessary, for one could plainly hear and speak in a normal tone. I distinctly heard a feminine voice ask me for a number, but before I could think of one, she selected another person's offering, to perform her trick, and told me to retire as she was busy. There was considerable buzzing going on in the bell-shaped ear-piece. But this noise would no doubt be soon eliminated and one would be able to converse over a busy wire without disturbance; if they were quick in selecting a number. Kate informed me that the lady's voice I had heard was many miles away and had been carried by Electricity over two small metal wires. There was no way of proving this statement at the time, but I will say that I looked behind the cupboard and found no one hiding.

AS I came from the Telephone box, Kate showed me another much smaller box. It was the Radio. Again I heard voices. This time there was a man singing to his mother in a sad voice. He cried for her like a calf. It was a very good imitation, but the music was very poor and uneven. Most of the notes were off key and very flat. However, this was to be expected, Kate said, as the Radio was a new invention and not fully developed at that time. Like the telephone, the voice and music were carried over the same distance, but with Radio there were no wires strung along the way. Kate said that the noise or music was hurled through the air by Electricity and caught by the Radio in the shop. The man who owned the shop said that the Radio was "in tune" with the sending equipment. Again, I had to take their word for it, but my personal opinion was that the things were very much out of tune.

Kate was a master conjurer and took delight in pointing out a third box in which the music had been caught and stored up for future hearing. I know that my fellow Romans are thinking that I am a great liar when I tell of such seemingly impossible things as these. I assure everyone that the actual devices were before me and performed just as I have stated. However, I am at a

loss to tell how they worked, and I believe that neither Kate nor the shop-man could have done much explaining, had I been able to question them at any length.

I, myself, hardly believed in the last mechanical box, the Phonograph, but the shopkeeper convinced me beyond all doubt with a fourth box. He called this last device a Dictaphone. He requested me to speak a few words in the attached tube. He then made a certain mystic motion with his hands and, lo . . . I again heard my own voice speak from the box and say the words I had already spoken. Verily, I heard my voice speak the very same words over and over again. He told me that a thousand years hence my voice would continue repeating the words from the box, even though I would be long since dead. Ah, my Romans, this was indeed a very strange land of very strange people who had very strange boxes. The Dictaphone, which captured my voice, was the greatest thing of all. I could listen to it for hours.

I would have stayed and better examined this marvelous Dictaphone, but Kate, in her characteristic New York rushing manner, led me outside the shop. She said that I had not seen anything compared to what she had yet to show me. She referred to more New York inventions, for she was then wearing the typical dress.

Under her guidance we came upon a large hole in the street. It was covered with a hood-like canopy and was the entrance to an ingenious subterranean chariot-train called the Subway.

We sped down the brightly illuminated steps of this hole until I thought we surely must have reached the realm of Hades. At a very low level we came upon a great open place. On either side in deep channels, I saw swiftly moving trains made up of many wheeled chariots. They were much longer than the Taxi and travelled at terrific speed. I had thought we were to watch their operation, but before I knew what had happened, we were thrust inside of one that had quickly stopped at our feet. In an instant we were whisked away in the darkness. I had become quite fond of Kate by this time and trusted her implicitly, but nevertheless my heart was riding in my mouth during the entire journey underground.

I FELT a sudden change of atmosphere and Kate told me that we were traveling under the bed of a River. Under the bed of East River we were boring our path! I could hardly believe it! Great ships were plowing their way on the surface of the river above as we rushed through the darkness under the water. The roar of the train wheels was deaf-

ening on the ears, but I liked it, for Kate swayed close to my side and gave me reassuring squeezes on the arm. The inside of the train was well lighted and very pleasant, except that most of the passengers had been eating garlic and had neglected to chew their cloves.

Leaving the train at a place called Atlantic Station, we immediately boarded another. This new train ran underground for a while and then emerged to the surface and thence to a high level built upon Steel stilts. The train was no longer called the Subway. It was to be known as the Elevated, while it ran on the stilts. I was much happier to be nearer to Heaven than to Hades. I hoped that the attendant up front would not forget how to steer.

In about one-half hour we had travelled what would have been a day's journey in Rome. Soon we came upon the city of Coney Island. Even at that time I could hardly believe that I had been set free only that morning. I had traveled many miles unto a new city and had seen the most marvelous things of my life, and the hour was only half-after-ten by the New York reckoning. As Kate remarked, the evening was young "yet" and "I ain't seen nothin' yet."

Coney Island was a gorgeous dream city that had been especially built for the encouragement of

young couples in love. It proved to be an ideal place for one to become intimately acquainted with the fair lady. However Kate and I hardly required any stimulant to promote our congeniality. For I had long since marveled over how quickly we had come to know and understand each other's feelings during the short time we had been together. Only a few hours past, we had not known of each other's existence, but our close companionship through those short adventure-seeking hours had bound us together like friends and lovers of long standing. Our unrestrained emotions, bursting forth as we discovered new adventures at every turn, had opened our hearts and torn down the usual barricade of poise one generally affects when in company with one of the opposite sex. It was surprising how quickly a stranger could meet and become an intimate friend of a New York lady. Nevertheless, I found that our Coney Island visit added strength to our mutual bond, and we both felt as if we had known each other since birth.

During the hour that we toured the city of Coney Island, I saw so many marvelous sights and strange devices that my head was muddled in a mydiar of dancing Electric lights amidst hundreds of hot-meat vendors and countless squawking advertisers of gambling.

ONE thing I will never forget was our many rides on breath-taking death-defying devices that were known as Coasters. These Coasters were built up on high stilts, oh! much higher than the elevated stilts. They were also built down deep like the Subway. Their paths continually dropped from high pinnacles to deep ravines below. It was as if the builders had not been able to make up their minds as to what they were trying to construct, Subway or Elevated.

The principle of the Coaster was that each man passenger had to clutch his woman companion tightly as she squealed in fright on the top of each hill. A long dark tunnel had been conveniently placed on a nice level stretch at the base of the last hill. By the time the tunnel was reached the male escort had become well acquainted with his fair lady's outline. It seems needless to report that when we found ourselves shot into the tunnel in close embrace, we straightway eliminated any further delay of our inevitable kiss. In fact we made up for any time that might have been lost. I want to say right here, that, even though Kate's words usually were only short, meaningless ejaculations, I felt that she possessed an eloquence of expression, such as I had never attained in any of my many-worded speeches in Rome, when she con-

cluded each kiss with her, "Oh, Daddy."

The Coaster was a wonderful invention!

Later, Kate gleefully introduced me to another United States or New York wonder-box. It was a device that required only an instant to paint one's likeness. It was called the Photograph. It was the most wonderful box of all the boxes . . . even more wonderful than the Dictaphone.

Kate and I were led to a seat in a toy airplane, while an attendant made some little movements over his box-device. In less time than it takes me to write, he supplied us with six miniature paintings that were most exact in detail and likeness. Nowhere have I ever seen such marvelous work. Nothing will ever equal the lightning speed with which we were painted. All my life I had longed for a portrait of myself, but never did I think I would become rich or famous enough to have my desire fulfilled. The six paintings from the wonderful Photograph-box I gave to Kate for safe-keeping. They were, by far, the greatest inventions of all this invention-blessed land.

During the return journey to New York we found the Subway to be considerably less crowded and we were able to ride in seats. I had not noticed that there were seats on the first trip. Kate snuggled to my side and allowed her

head to droop on my shoulder. I reasoned that she had at last become tired and sleepy and I had visions of our retiring to her abode. But in this I was mistaken, for we had no sooner reached Times Square Station than she was up on her feet, bubbling over with new enthusiasm and lust for adventure. What stamina these New York ladies possessed!

We hailed a passing taxi and entered its passenger compartment to settle in the deep luxury of the seats. Kate directed the driver to take us out Lenox Avenue to One-hundred and Thirty-fifth Street. I had become so acclimated to being ridden swiftly hither and yon in New York, that the taxi's high speed no longer thrilled me. However, I found a new and better thrill could be had in a taxi. It was a marvelous place in which one could promote unrestricted love-making with one's fair lady while flying through the main streets of New York. The Coaster had taught us to make the most of every opportunity. Likewise, most of New York's citizens must have been in the same mood, for I noticed that every taxi we passed contained occupants similarly entwined. I gleefully thought of how it would appear in Rome if all men tried to caress their maidens while riding along the Forum in chariots. However, it was surprising how quickly one

could travel while engaged in this artful occupation. Just when things were becoming interesting, we were interrupted by arriving at our destination.

AFTER we alighted, Kate told me that she was taking me to a place called a Night Club. It seemed that any stranger's evening in New York was not complete without a concluding Night Club visit. I was willing to follow Kate unto the last, last adventure, wherever she chose to lead, for the promise in her eyes was such as one sees when the trail is near the end. My only fear was that the Professor's fast diminishing purse would not stand the strain much longer.

The Night Club proved to be a very large Restaurant in which many citizens and their ladies were having little feasts at secluded, independent tables. A squad of African musicians furnished weird barbaric notes from odd-shaped trumpets and a large drum. The noise beat upon the ears with stimulating rhythm and seemed to have a hilarious effect upon everyone present. A chorus of sparsely dressed Ethiopian females were executing fantastic dance steps and body wiggles in a little open place between the tables. The free spirit of congeniality, together with the intoxicating music, steeled everyone to a high pitch. This tempo

was undoubtedly necessary to assist one in downing the liquid these New Yorkers had to drink. The drink was called hootch and it had to be diluted with a portion of mineral water and lemon juice before one dared place it in one's mouth. It was always drunk in a single quaff or gulped down as speedily as possible, lest one's grimaces became permanent. I think the stuff was made from this unknown thing they called Electricity.

I longed to show these New Yorkers our Roman art of sipping drinks; but after drinking my first glass of hootch, I, too, realized that their method of gulping was for the best.

As the evening sped along into the last hours of night, I felt as if a veil had been lifted from my eyes. The lights seemed to have brightened in color, the dancing figures seemed to have more animation and less raiment on their bodies as they floated across the floor. Everything seemed to be toned into a beautiful, harmonious blend, and Kate's ravishing beauty seemed more vivid than ever as she openly kissed me across the table. I realized that we had had many drinks of hooch, and although I was not in any sense drunk, I certainly was pleased with the outlook on life in this wonderful New York and the United States. However, I decided to control my thirst lest I

became totally intoxicated and would be unable to survive the climax of a most wonderful evening.

Oh, what a climax it was. When it finally came upon us it was nothing like what I had expected. The brightness of the evening was immediately snuffed out. Tragedy crossed the dance floor in the form of a powerfully built Ethiopian who made some slurring remark to Kate. This was the beginning of the end!

QUICK as a flash I was upon the slave. He must have underestimated my condition, for he was unprepared for my onslaught and I quickly and easily lifted him over my head and hurled him through the air. He crashed with terrific force upon the startled musicians and scattered them and their rigging to the four winds. This action brought forth screams of terror from all the ladies, and chaos reigned throughout the hall. From that time on, I was busily engaged in battle. In a short space of time I had piled up an amazing heap of humanity on the musician's platform. Verily, I would have conquered all of my enemies, had they not brought into play another insidious New York invention, called the Gat, or Pistol. Before this new weapon, I went down in defeat.

These pistols, or gats, were

diabolical things of steel. They were short, compact little devices that spat forth flame and fire and sent lead pellets hurtling through the air. Without these weapons, one was helpless. I sank to the floor writhing in agony. Three or four pistols had used my body as a target. I had a vague recollection of some New York ushers or Cops appearing upon the scene, but at that point I fell into a swoon.

Upon awakening, I found myself again a prisoner. For a while I was in a hospital but I was later transferred to a cell in the New York jail. At first my wounds were very painful and I feared that I should die before I could again see Kate. However, my strong well-kept body soon healed and I was ready to depart. But the Cops insisted that I remain in my cell and there I languished for three months.

While awaiting my release, I had the opportunity to observe and study two more marvels of this land. They were paper and printing.

The paper was similar to our *Liber*. Like our *Pugillares*, it was made of wood and was in common use. But it was very different from these *Pugillares*, which were only wax-coated slabs of wood. The paper was the result of boiling wood until it became a pulp and then pressing this mass into thin sheets. It was as dur-

ing as our Papyrus from Egypt and after it had dried out thoroughly, one could fold or bend the stuff without having it crack or become brittle.

None of the paper came in rolls, but instead was bound in little small leafed booklets. On the paper was the other invention called printing. It was a quick way to make copies of the same writing.

This printing was accomplished by using large embossed plates similar to our coins. These plates were coated with an ink-fluid and lightly touched on the paper with a machine. The resulting impression was printing. Long speeches and even paintings were produced in this manner. During my stay in the jail I had ample opportunity to read many books and news bulletins.

MY association with my fellow prisoners has given me a thought that I believe will be helpful to you Romans when you demand my immediate release. From listening to the conversation of the men about me I learned the names of some of the prominent men in this country. Knowing that a messenger will be dispatched with all haste as soon as this report reaches Rome, I am giving the names of the men most spoken of, so that it will be known to whom the order of release should be addressed: Gene Tunney, Cal, Hornsby, Babe, Al

Smith, Lindy, Hoover, Jack Dempsey, and Will Rogers.

After three months in jail I was given a trial. Such a trial as it was. It was just a foolish pretense of justice, the sole object being to have all concerned establish themselves as public speakers of great renown. I was not allowed to even make a speech. One blustering citizen made some highly insulting remarks about my mentality. I took immediate offense and grappled him about the throat, but the Cops sprang to his rescue and I was forced to listen in silence. Upon his word alone, I was sent back to my cell. He called me the "Ice Man" and said many other things which I will not repeat, lest Rome declare war with this country. I was merely the ball in a game. I was tossed back and forth from cell to court while the lawyers and some citizens called Alienists, were enabled to show their skill at the pastime.

Throughout the trial I made vain efforts to establish my identity but was repulsed at every turn. Finally I was judged insane and committed to an asylum. I am now in this asylum called B—— While here imprisoned I have written this report, in the hope that it will in some way reach you Romans and that my release will be speedily effected. I advise you to send a large army with the messenger, for these

New Yorkers are very obstinate in their views and say that you Romans are a "dead" race of people.

I will bide my time and await the coming of a likely looking visitor to whom I must intrust the delivery of this report.

Signed,

MARCUS PUBLIUS.

P.S. I have not heard from Kate since the disastrous climax in the Night Club. I fear that she was mortally wounded for I know that she would have appeared at the trial to help prove my sanity. One of my associates in the jail thought that she was in the gold-digging business. I pray that she is alive and is out digging this gold, so that she will soon have enough to purchase my release. Otherwise I must wait and hope that this report finds its way to my countrymen.

MARCUS PUBLIUS.

Author's Note: Again we remark that some may question Marcus Publius' sanity and our action in securing his release from the insane Asylum. But, lest someone also question the sanity of the author, himself, it must be remembered that out of the large sum he received for this work, the reader has helped to defray a part when he purchased this magazine.

W.W.D.

THE END

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THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

Spectrum. Selected and edited by Kingsley Amis and Robert Conquest. 304 pp. Harcourt, Brace & World. \$4.50

Presenting herewith—another entry in the “Anthology Racket!” (Great fanfare of trumpets). I don’t have anything against anthologies; in certain cases they perform useful services. For example, when an editor of a science fiction magazine collects what he considers the cream of the year’s crop, this is a legitimate form of self-advertisement. When Judy Merrill does her survey-of-the-year anthology, I may personally feel it’s an almost impossible task, but I respect her efforts to make order from chaos. When an individual author wants to collect in one volume a sizeable chunk of his best work, that is his privilege and an undeniable gift for the reader. What other kind of anthology is left? The kind under consideration here, where a person other than the

author brings together a group of stories for no particular reason or occasion and where all too often the only criterion is personal taste. And I, for one, don’t think that personal taste alone justifies another in the endless stream of books. Why not an anthology of my favorites, or John Doe’s, or Jane Smith’s? In my opinion, there are certain prerequisites that make an anthology worthwhile; if the selections try to show something in the development or trend of certain theories or subjects; or if the selections are prefaced by some particularly witty or pungent or telling observations on either author or story (e.g., the Damon Knight anthology reviewed recently). Of course, personal preference is desirable but, to apply an age-old but still true thought, it is a *necessary* rather than a sufficient condition.

The volume in question, therefore, is not my idea of an impor-

tant anthology for the reasons mentioned. But beyond that, I was not aware that compiling an anthology based on such tenuous grounds was so difficult a job as to require the services of *two* editors. There are only ten stories and a brief essay, more about science fiction in general than the individual selections. And yet, by the simple act of plucking these tidbits from their memory books, each of these gentlemen gets another title to add to his credit.

I feel that the foregoing remarks remain applicable, regardless of the quality of the stories. However, in *Spectrum*, the quality happens to be high. Some of my favorites are here, but the editors have been more than unusually unfortunate in the matter of duplication. There is bound to be this hazard because of the number of anthologies. In fact, it is possible for the same story to see print half a dozen times—say from a magazine, to a magazine anthology in hardcover, to its reprint in paperback, to a Judy Merrill hardcover and then paperback, to the author's own collection, etc. However, in *Spectrum* (through no fault of the editors), not only is there this duplication but two of the stories have seen print elsewhere within the same month—Katherine MacLean's "Unhuman Sacrifice" was one of Damon Knight's recent

choices in his *Century of Science Fiction* and "By His Bootstraps," by Robert Heinlein, recently came out in a paperback anthology of his own. Among the others, "The Executioners," by Algis Budrys, is one of my all-time favorites, and "Null-P" by William Tenn is a delightful tongue-in-cheek commentary on our politics and mores. Clifford Simak's "Limiting Factor" has never been one of my favorites, while "The Midas Plague" by Frederick Pohl, though enjoyable, always reminds me of his own *The Man Who Ate The World*. (In both these stories, Mr. Pohl manifests his obsession with super-abundance in a most unusual fashion.) The other offerings are by Stephen Barr, John Berryman, H. Chandler Elliot and Robert Sheckley. Some people may wonder at the omission of such illustrious Englishmen as Arthur Clarke and Brian Aldiss, in view of the fact that the editors are English themselves. This circumstance doesn't show a lack of national pride; the omissions were intentional as the editors tried to present stories which have not had such wide circulation in England. This is fine for the British reader, but might not this very limitation make this publication somewhat invalid in the United States?

Island. By Aldous Huxley. 335 pp. Harper & Brothers. \$5.00.

I must take my stand with the vocal but extremely small number of critics who, try as they may, have read Aldous Huxley's latest book, and found it wanting. Even the best writers are entitled to produce an occasional dud, but this is small comfort to any reader who has been the victim of one of them.

The action of the book takes place on Pala, an island in the Pacific where an ideal society has flourished for over one hundred years. The same science that caused the horrors in *Brave New World* is here used to free people from the shackles of pettiness and inhibition, and lead them toward the goal of heightened awareness. But this idyllic life is threatened by a conspiracy which covets the vast oil reserves on Pala. Forgive me if I have made all this sound as if it might be interesting. In Mr. Huxley's version, it most assuredly is not.

The reader sees Palinese society through the experiences of Will Farnaby, a newspaperman who is shipwrecked on the island. He comes the closest to being a credible character of anyone in the book. But after a short time, one even becomes annoyed with him. He is such a willing dupe for anything Huxley wants him to do. He is a "line feeder" in the best tradition of the rehearsal coach in drama. Obliginglly he asks his little one-line cue ques-

tions just so Huxley can answer them with several paragraphs of his philosophy. And this question-answer gambit is literally the entire "meat" (I use the term loosely) of the novel.

I cannot even find it in my heart and mind to attribute to the book the saving grace of saying it just missed. The sad truth is that *Island* is no near miss; it's miles off the mark. It is a veritable Mulligan stew of yoga, mysticism, Buddhism, sex, and miraculous mushrooms, to name but a few. Come to think of it, in many respects it resembles, to a depressing degree, the incredible mix that made up Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, except that the latter, believe it or not, was more interesting.

I don't know—maybe Huxley feels that he is being very profound, but for my money, all he does is present a few ideas (a very different thing!) among which are some so shopworn as to be almost stereotypes of themselves. This is hardly the path toward profundity.

The Alley God. By Philip Jose Farmer. 176 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 50¢.

This is a rather disappointing trio of short novels. Each story contains both good and bad elements—enough good ones so that it is possible to be entertained and enough bad ones so that no

lasting impression is made.

In the title work, the author has created a memorable blood-and-guts character called Old Man, who possesses probably the most astonishing family tree this side of Venus. But the character of the girl sociology student who is supposed to be Old Man's antithesis is not nearly so strong as it could be.

The second tale is, to my mind, the weakest of the lot. It is cast in Farmer's familiar biological-sexual framework, but in this instance it's not a very striking or original example of this genre, which is so much the author's personal hallmark. Perhaps this is a format *not* capable of limitless variation, though I find it hard to believe. For those readers interested, it is called *The Captain's Daughter* and is another story revolving around a type of human parasite.

In the third story, Mr. Farmer tries for something very different—humor so broad that it's almost farce. The main trouble is that it is a bit too drawn out. Titled *The God Business*, it is a fantasy about a place in Illinois transformed, by some highly developed wishful thinking on the part of a college professor, into a land of bacchanalian orgies. Most of the action occurs as the armed services bring all forces to bear to put a halt to matters.

I hope that Mr. Farmer

has better, or rather, more consistent, good fortune next time around.

* * *

SPECIAL NOTE TO READERS:

Doubleday has just covered itself with glory by bringing together in one hardcover book a series of seventeen far-flung essays by the indefatigable Isaac Asimov. It is titled *Fact and Fancy* and is available at \$3.95.

Another event of interest to many may be the publication of the first six volumes of Pyramid's new paperback series, *The Worlds of Science*. These six volumes contain, in addition to the text, the photographs and drawings from the original hardcover editions. They are priced at 65¢ to 75¢ and are a real bargain. Later on, Pyramid will issue a second group of titles, some of which will be original works written especially for this series.

The titles currently released are:

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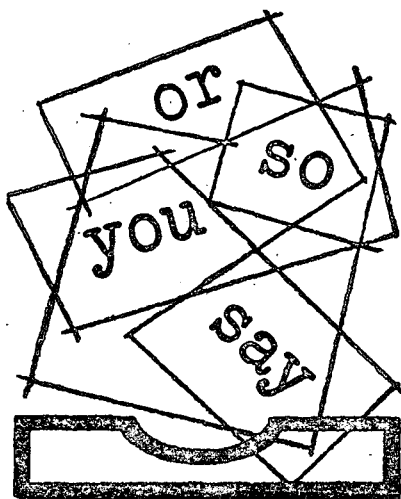
The Road to Man—Herbert Wendt—natural history

The Human Brain—John Pfeiffer—physiology

Maya—Charles Gallenkamp—archaeology

Living Earth—Peter Farb—biology

Chemistry Creates a New World—Bernard Jaffe—chemistry



Dear Editor:

I'm afraid your June *AMAZING* was not as ace as it should have been. It was still good, but there was one thing that really tore it down with me. "Thunder in Space" was political, I thought, and it would have been better printed in *ANALOG*—that's mostly the kind of "stuff" they have there. I've complained once before about politics in science fiction, and I'll keep complaining as long as you persist in printing such "stuff". It doesn't belong in *AMAZING*—*AMAZING* is too good for it. I buy *AMAZING* because I like to read *science fiction*, not a prediction of the future so logical that it's almost fact—at least not in politics, please. As I said in a letter for your last November

issue, politics is okay in politics, it's fine there—but not in sf!!

The only other complaint I had about the issue was the cover. Oh, it was good enough, except for one little item. Schomburg's covers are becoming rather stereotyped. Always he has that same type of rocket, the same type of space suited figures and always that same old sky fading from dark to lighter on the bottom, speckled with stars here and there. Other than this, it was fine.

I was glad, very glad, to see another one of J. G. Ballard's stories in the ish. English writers these days are better than many American writers. For one thing, they write *science fiction*, no quaint little political deal attached, if it is, at least its future future politics.

The profile on Simak was great; keep Moskowitz at it. The other article was also good, but don't you think two fact pieces in one issue is overdoing it just a bit?

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Ave.
Sea Cliff, N.Y.

● *You're certainly entitled to your personal preferences concerning the subject matter of science fiction. The fact remains that politics has and always will be an interesting and integral part of life in the future. Hence, stories fictionalizing this social science belong in AMAZING as in*

other science fiction magazines.

We do not plan to make a habit of including more than one fact piece, however, occasionally it may happen.

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

With summer vacation here, making my free time as limitless as my enthusiasm, it's time to write to my favorite two magazines, AMAZING and FANTASTIC.

Before anything else, I'd like to thank you for indirectly introducing me to fandom. I answered Seth Johnson's ad, and am now a member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. Great Fun!

Being unimaginative, I'll start with the covers. Barr, Schomburg, and Schelling are the best, with Finlay and Adkins doing the best interior illos. All the art is above the standard fare offered by some of your competition.

The Profiles are most interesting, though, as everybody complains, too short. The Reprints are also a welcome feature to newcomers like myself.

As to the stories, I'm too far behind in my reading to make specific ratings, but I'm glad to see all the big names, the return of Mark Clifton, and look forward to the return of K. Laumer.

I like to think I see a new trend in your "stealing" Aldiss and Ballard from "over there". Could it be that you are going to follow the British mags, and "ad-

vance backwards" to the Golden Age, era of the "sense of wonder"?

I find your mags to be a sort of "happy medium" in the field: light, yet thought-provoking; variegated; no preaching; and no strange literary-experimentation (except for Bunch. Maybe if I simply ignore him, you will too!?).

Mike Hayes
703 Washington Ave.
Dunkirk, N.Y.

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

Congratulations on the May issue . . . what there was of it. Please, when you run reprints, don't let it be at the expense of the new stories. If you must, run the longer reprints as serials (I can hear the groans from those paranoiacs who are persecuted by serials; but tell me, oh ye sufferers, do you live so much in the past that you would waive fresh material for stale?) Don't misunderstand me, I like the Classic Reprints just as well as the next guy, maybe more; but when *more than half* of an issue is devoted to them, I wonder what has happened to the contributors to AMAZING. Editor?

For the rest of the issue; "The Stars, My Brothers" brought out a point often skirted in sf, namely, between a humanoid and an alien race, who is the good guy? Why, the humanoid, of course? Kieran's view is most likely un-

popular with most people, but, in reality, isn't it the most logical and realistic one? One small objection, however; Hamilton could have put the message across, along with the story, in fewer words. Not too critical, though.

Finally, "The Protector", although based on about the most hackneyed theme in sf, (Life after the War), was quite a yarn. That little unpleasant feeling in my stomach was no mistake. The depiction of Lemke is very well done.

As for the art work, the cover was good—hang on to Schelling. Finlay, as usual, did good interior work, especially for "The Protector."

Issue, on the whole, and despite my carping, good.

Douglas Bodkin
24 Mariposa Lane
Orinda, Calif.

● *Because of the many requests for the "Airlords of Han" we made a very special exception and ran it at full length. As the succeeding issues have indicated, we do not intend to let reprints take precedence over new material.*

Dear Editor:

The first thing I have to say about your May issue of AMAZING is, *What a cover!* I've never seen anything like it before in my entire life—such color, such

technique, such a masterpiece! It even topped your terrific last month's cover by Birmingham. This month's is easily the best I have seen in all my three years as an AMAZING reader (this also includes your FANTASTIC covers), and you've had some real masterpieces lately—all dwarfed by George Schelling.

And now to the stories: Edmond Hamilton is just as good as he always was and better in some ways—more settled down if he keeps the style used in his last novel and your two recent pieces, though my favorites of his will always be *City at World's End* and *Star of Life*.

"The Protector" by John Jakes—I used to dread his stories as dull but now I avidly look forward to them.

The Buck Rogers reprint was a treat to all true sf fans, but the end seemed to signify that there are no further adventures, since he is supposed to be an old man then and the Han are conquered and out of the way. Is that all there was? Just two Buck Rogers stories?

Bob Adolfsen
9 Prospect Ave.
Sea Cliff, N.Y.

● *There were only two Buck Rogers stories in magazine publication. The balance of his adventures appeared in the comic strip form.*



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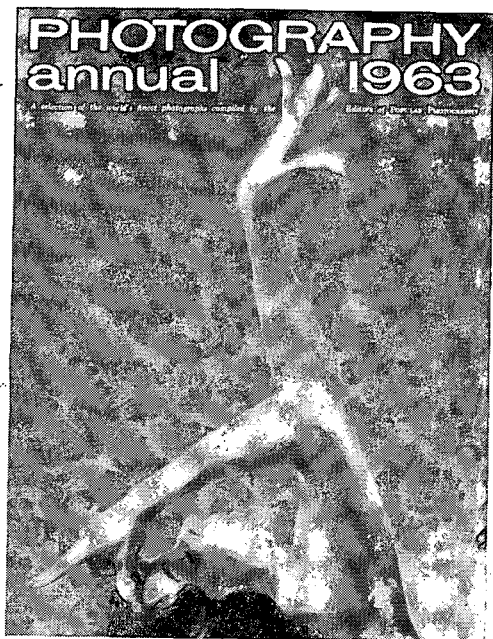
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